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THE BATTLE OF SIDI BOU ZID

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at CGSC and assist other CGSC departments in integrating military history into their instruction.
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21. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) On 14 February 1943 the German Fifth Panzer Army in North Africa attacked elements of the US 1st Armored Division near Sidi bou Zid, Tunisia. Converging German elements surrounded two infantry battalions and drove off an American armored counterattack with heavy loss. The surrounded infantry held out for over two days but eventually attempted to break out on the night of 16-17 February. Only a handful of soldiers succeeded in reaching friendly forces, some of which were quickly caught up in the battle of Kasserine Pass.			

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BATTLE ANALYSIS
OF
The Battle of Sidi Bou Zid
14 February 1943
Tunisia, North Africa
Defensive, Encircled Forces

Submitted by:
Staff Group D, Section 4
In Partial Completion of Course P651

Staff Group D Members:

Colonel Bedell
Major Arregui
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Major Cassetori
Major Chandler
Major Engels
Major Grant
Major Grossman
Major Kiersey
Major McIntyre
Major Sullivan
Major Teichman
Major Thurman

COMMON REFERENCE: Sidi Bou Zid

TYPE OPERATION: Defensive, Encircled Forces

OPPOSING FORCES: U.S.: Combat Command A
1st Armored Division

German: 10th and 21st Panzer
Divisions

SYNOPSIS: On 14 February 1943, the German Fifth Panzer Army in North Africa launched a limited offensive to drive Allied forces out of Tunisia's Eastern Dorsale. The 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions struck Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, at Sidi Bou Zid in the western exit of Faid Pass. Converging German elements overran the American artillery positions, drove off a tank battalion with heavy loss, and surrounded the U.S. 168th Infantry Regiment. Although the encircled forces defended their positions stubbornly, an armored counterattack to relieve them failed disastrously on 15 February, leaving the 168th no alternative but to attempt a breakout on the night of 16-17 February. Only a handful of soldiers succeeded in reaching Allied lines.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Howe, George F. Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West.

Blumenson, Martin. Kasserine Pass.

Batson, CPT William R. "Sidi Bou Zid--A Case History of Failure." Armor, Nov-Dec 1982.



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Sidi bou Zid

Part I - Define the Subject

The battle of Sidi bou Zid began on 14 February 1943 and attempts to break out of the encirclement lasted until 16 February 1943. The battle occurred in the vicinity of the small village of Sidi bou Zid, which is located west of the Faid Pass on the road to Sbeitla Pass in southern Tunisia. The 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions struck Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division.

Sources of information concerning the battle include books, military journal articles, unit logs and battle accounts, and letters from participants.

Comprehensive Bibliographies

a. Desert Warfare: A Selective Bibliography, 1929-1982.

(1) Report date: May 1982

(2) Abstract: This bibliography lists books and general periodical articles dealing with the history and tactics of desert warfare. Many of the items discuss particular battles in North Africa in 1940-1943, or in the Arab-Israeli wars, 1947-1973.
(author)

(3) SBI site holding symbol: TRAL

(4) AD number: A132264

b. Bibliography from masters thesis, "Role of the Field Artillery in the Battle of Kasserine Pass," written by Major David W. Hazen, CGSC, 1973.

(1) Report date: 1973

(2) Abstract: The report analyzes the role of the field artillery in the Battle of Kasserine Pass. The bibliography is extensive and far more broad than

the Sidi bou Zid battle alone. It would be useful to anyone working on the Tunisian Campaign.

(3) SBI site holding symbol: TRAL

(4) AD number: B061564L

c. Annotated bibliography for this battle analysis (below.)

Oral History Possibilities

Though none were used by this study group, letters received by CPT William R. Setson in response to his ARMOR article indicate that there are several survivors who maintain an interest in the battle. Copies of these letters are included as inclosures. Addresses of the writers are:

Henry E. Gardiner (see bibliography)
P. O. Box 1931
Bozeman, MT 59715

Laurence Robertson (Plt Ldr, Co A, 1st Armd
305 Cherry Lane Regiment, 1st Armd Div
Teaneck, NJ 07666 at the time of battle.)

Herbert F. Hillenmeyer (Plt Ldr, Co H, 1st Armd
413 Springwood Lane Regiment, 1st Armd Div
Louisville, KY 40207 at the time of battle.)

COL Lyndon B. Cole
315 Limestone Creek Rd
San Antonio, TX 78232

Annotated Bibliography

Books

BLUMENSON, Martin. Kasserine Pass. New York: Tower Publications, 1973.

The book is written about the climactic battle for Tunisia which occurred near a tiny North African village called Kasserine. It includes approximately 50 pages about the battle which took place around the area of Sidi bou Zid. Both

friendly and enemy planning and execution actions are addressed. The author provides a good overview, but not many specifics about the place, the equipment nor the combatants.

EISENHOWER, Dwight David. The War Years. Vol II of The Papers Of Dwight David Eisenhower. Edited by Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. 4 vols. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.

This volume of The Papers Of Dwight David Eisenhower encompasses the time period of November 1942 to September 1943. Included in these papers is correspondence between Eisenhower and numerous key figures of the time, to include military leaders and statesmen. Important issues examined in this volume are the Tunisian Campaign, Sicily, and the fall of Mussolini. This book provides an interesting and informative base for research into this time frame.

ROMMEL, Erwin. The Rommel Papers. B. H. Liddel Hart, with the assistance of Lucie-Maria Rommel, Manfred Rommel, and Fritz Bayerlein. Translated by Paul Findley. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1953.

Rommel has very little to say about the Battle of Sidi bou Zid. What he does say is an indictment against the German High Command; that is, that success was not exploited.

RUTHERFORD, Ward. Kasserine: Baptism Of Fire. New York: Ballentine Books, 1970.

This book is part of a Ballentine Books collection -- Ballentine's Illustrated History of World War II. It is unclear as to why this book was written. It contains a short (9 book) bibliography, but no footnotes to indicate the extent or which references were used. The writer is a British journalist who experienced German occupation in Jersey in 1927. Advice and assistance received is unclear. It is a basically undocumented interpretation from secondary sources.

U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY. Operations in the Mediterranean and Pacific Theaters. Vol. II of A Military History of World War II. Edited by T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent Esposito. West Point, New York: AG Printing Office, 1953.

Written for study at the US Army Military Academy. This volume, 565 pages, covers the operations in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters, concentrating on the war in North Africa, the war in Sicily and Italy, and the war with Japan. The Battle of Kasserine Pass is covered on pages 60-65. It provides a good synopsis of Sidi bou Zid. It also provides a tactical sequence of events and an evaluation of key errors made which impacted on the battle. This is a good reference for grasping the broad aspects of Sidi bou Zid as they apply to the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Journal Articles

BETSON, William R. (CPT, USA). "Sidi bou Zid - A Case History of Failure." Armor, XCI, No. 5, November-December 1982, pp. 38-44.

A concise article which examines the battle of Sidi bou Zid from start to finish, concluding with lessons learned. The author's intent is to compare the characteristics of this battle which would prove similar to combat by NATO forces in the future. It appears to be a non-biased approach based on an in-depth study. A very refreshing and easy-to-read article.

BLUMENSON, Martin. "Command at Kasserine Pass." Army, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 1967, pp. 32-34.

In this article, Blumenson provides a case history on the contrasting styles of several US military leaders involved in the planning and execution of battle plans in North Africa, Tunisia, the Kasserine Pass, and Sidi bou Zid. His article provides good insight into the character of and conflict between Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall and Major General Orlando Ward.

_____. "The Agony and the Glory." Infantry,
July-August 1967.

A detailed description that took place during the opening hours of the battle of Kasserine pass. It describes the disposition of forces under the Commander 168th Infantry Regiment and the actions in the proximity of Sidi bou Zid between the 14th and the 20th of February, 1943. Detailed report of force strengths and losses -- names of subordinate commanders.

BURBA, Edwin H. (LTC, USA). "The Battle of Sidi bou Zid: 15 Feb 43," The Field Artillery Journal, XXXIII, No. 9 (September 1943), pp. 643-644.

This is a very short and at times hard to follow article that accounts for a portion of the artillery operations at Sidi bou Zid. It bears out the theme of much of the artillery training doctrine of that time: disperse vehicles, emplace weapons so that they are mutually supporting and establish a comprehensive, all-around warning system. In addition, it emphasizes the artillery's need for skill in dismounted patrolling (by day and night); individual ability to move cross country at night, either mounted or on foot, will frequently spell the difference between safety and capture.

GARDINER, Henry D (COL, USA). "We Fought at Kasserine." Armored Cavalry Journal, March-April 1948.

The article has good, descriptive comments about the terrain in the vicinity of Kasserine Pass. There are no direct references to Sidi bou Zid.

ROBINETT, Paul . . (BG, USA). "The Axis Offensive in Central Tunisia - February 1943." Armor, May-June, 1954.

The author served as the Commander of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division in Tunisia during the early days of World War II. At the time of the writing, Brigadier General Robinett was the Chief of the Special Studies Division, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army. Written from an American commander's point of view, the author used personal recollections

and several books (listed in the article's end notes) to develop this article.

He deals with the general situation in southern Tunisia, the terrain and climate, three battles (Sidi bou Zid is addressed on pages 10-11), and with lessons learned. General Robinett tells how the Germans pushed the Allied forces out of Kasserine Pass and how we reacted to this setback, turning the tide of battle against a then-more-experienced enemy. During the first two days, in which the battle of Sidi bou Zid was fought, Robinett's CCB was British First Army reserve, located more than a hundred miles from the battle. He was, therefore, not in the initial fighting and provides only reflective comments concerning Sidi bou Zid. He does provide a good synopsis of the situation, weather, and terrain in central Tunisia. His analysis is short, but useful to get an overall appreciation of how this battle fits into the general Kasserine Pass area campaign.

Letters to Military Journals

HOWZE, Hamilton H. (GEN, USA). "Sidi bou Zid: Another View." Letter to Armor, XCII, No. 2, March-April 1983, pp. 3-4.

RIGGSBY, Raymond M. (LTC, USA). "Sidi bou Zid: A Sergeant's View." Letter to Armor, XCII, No. 2, March-April, 1983, pp. 5-6.

Unpublished Military Material

CAREY, ARTHUR T. (COL, USA). "The Effect of ULTRA on the North African Campaign." AD Number: A118830 (microfiche), CARL, CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

This is an individual study project for the Army War College. The author used several books and articles as well as unpublished manuscripts (listed in his bibliography.) The article provides a new point of view. "The first lesson is that decrypts of this nature provide accurate raw information that must be properly analyzed and compared with other sources. Second: ULTRA information can give capabilities and

probabilities but not intentions. Again analysis is the key. The last major lesson is that the best intelligence is no substitute for good command strategy and tactics." (from the author's abstract)

HAZEN, David W. (MAJ, USA). "Role of the Field Artillery in the Battle of the Kasserine Pass," Master's Thesis, CGSC, 1973.

Written in an easy to read style, this thesis with its accompanying maps thoroughly describes and analyzes the role of the field artillery in the Battle of Kasserine Pass to include Sidi bou Zid. It examines artillery organization for combat, fire and maneuver on the battlefield, assignment of artillery tactical missions, and the artillery's influence on the battle.

LANG, Rudolf (Oberst a. D.). "Battles of Kampfgruppe Lang in Tunisia (10th Panzer Division), December 1942 to 15 April 1943." (Typewritten manuscript of the commander of Kampfgruppe Lang.) Garmisch, Germany: Office of the Chief of Military History, Historical Division USARE JR, 8 June 1947.

This manuscript was written from a German commander's point of view from memory. It is an undocumented, original contribution based on the recollections of the writer. Pages 22 and 23 deal briefly with the Sidi bou Zid battle. He credits American units with stiff resistance, though surrounded and outgunned.

U. S. ARMY. "Observer's Report of LTC G. E. Lynch, GSC, Observer from Headquarters, Army Ground Forces to North Africa, for the Period 30 December 1942 to 6 February 1943." (not dated). Fl. # N 6207.

This report covers the period of when forces landed in North Africa in November until 31 January 1943. The observer was apparently responsible to report on all units in North Africa during the time. His comments are written in sections as they pertain to primary staff areas of concern, i.e., G1, G2, G3 and G4. While the report does not provide any information directly impacting on the battle at Sidi bou Zid, it does

provide a good general background of what the units had encountered up through the end of January.

Other Material

BETSON, William R. (CPT, USA). Letter to Major Gregory Fontenot (attached).

Captain Betson wrote the Armor article referred to above. The letter contains clarification on the task organizations (Allied and Axis), notes on a conversation he had with MG (Ret) Peter C. Hains (commander of Combat Command A during the battle), and enclosing the letters referred to in the possible oral history sources above.

Sidi bou Zid

Part II - Strategic Situation

By mid-1942 German military might had reached its zenith. In the East, German armies had surrounded Leningrad, over-run central Russia, siezed the southern oil fields, and were threatening Stalingrad. In the West, they occupied most of France and the low countries while preparing to repulse the inevitable invasion of the continent. In Africa, the "Desert Fox" had proven the downfall of several Allied commanders, although immense distances and limited logistics had conspired to deny him a complete victory.

The Allies, on the other hand, found themselves on the ropes. British shipping had suffered tremendous losses from German submarines and the army had yet to fully recover from its physical and psychological drubbing in France. Only the nightly British air raids over Europe and the entry of the United States into the war offered any hope of success. However, the US had yet to provide significant forces for the fight, although material was arriving in steadily increasing amounts. On the Eastern Front, Russia had lost more than a million casualties in the previous year, not to mention much of her industry and her breadbasket, the Ukraine. Unless the Allies could open a second ground front soon, Russia might have to seek a separate peace.

Yet the location of that new front was a matter of hot debate at the highest levels. Led by General Marshall, the American Army strongly favored a landing on the continent and a drive directly into Germany at the earliest date. Unfortunately, even the most optimistic planner soon realized that a shortage of critical equipment (especially landing craft) could make such an operation impossible until at least late 1943 - too late to respond to Stalin's demands for help.

For their part the British, still scarred by the terrible losses of the First World War, preferred Churchill's famous peripheral approach through "the soft under-belly of Europe." Of course, operations in the Mediterranean could hardly be mounted while Rommel

held North Africa, especially since the French forces there had yet to declare their clear allegiance to the French government in exile. The compromise solution was Operation Torch.

While Rommel was busy with Montgomery in Tunisia, the Western Allies mounted the largest amphibious landing yet seen in the war. Three task forces totaling more than 100,000 men departed ports in Britain and the US to land in Morocco and Algeria on 8 November, 1942. The effect was to pose a potential threat to Rommel's rear only days after he had suffered a defeat at El Alamein and while he was still withdrawing westward. However, the Germans reacted with unexpected speed, slowing the Allied advance and finally preventing a link-up with Montgomery.

By January of 1943 the German strategic situation had worsened perceptibly. The Russian counter-attack at Stalingrad threatened to engulf all of Vith Army. In the West, large numbers of German troops were tied down in occupation duties and preparing for the anticipated Allied landings. In Africa, Rommel held two fronts roughly one hundred miles apart. Strategically, the initiative was clearly shifting to the Allies through the power of the offensive. While Allied military strength in Africa steadily increased, German resources were drawn off by higher priorities. Seeking the initiative as always, Rommel planned a counter-stroke through the Americans and behind the British and French forces to his west. The stage was set for the first battle of Kasserine.

Sidi bou Zid

Part III - Tactical Situation

1. STUDY OF THE AREA OF OPERATIONS.

a. Climate and Weather.

During the period of the Axis offensive, February 1943, the weather in and around Sidi bou Zid was variable. Although February is normally considered early spring in central Tunisia, wind, rain, hail, and even snow were still encountered. While the sun was out the weather could be pleasant, but when the clouds rolled in a penetrating cold prevailed. Axis forces located initially in the sunnier lowlands and dressed in light summer uniforms were attacking into the Allied forces whose defensive locations were generally in higher ground to the east where the weather was characterized by cloudier and wetter weather. 1

On Saturday, the 13th of February 1943, the weather which had been miserable during the past several days, with snow flurries and violent winds, suddenly improved. Although the sky remained half covered with heavy clouds, high winds persisted and the temperature remained cold, the atmospheric conditions became favorable for offensive operations. 2

The following day, the 14th, a strong westerly wind picked up, and by 0400 hours started a sandstorm. The German staff weathermen had accurately predicted these conditions, and when combined with the normal early morning haze, observation of the Faid Pass exit had become impossible from the American positions at Djebels Ksaura and Djebels Lessouda.

Primarily due to the difficult weather conditions the screening elements forward of the American positions, the attached 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry and the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion failed to intercept attacking German forces and the carefully prepared artillery concentrations on the pass exits went unfired. 3

Some communication outages which were reported throughout the morning of the 14th can possibly be attributed to the atmospheric conditions which were present.

Visibility limitations hindered surveillance and target acquisition to such an extent that the American artillery was overrun around the rear of Lessouda. Additionally, a clear picture of the size and composition of German forces was not relayed to the Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division.

Weather and climate did not significantly influence night operations, weapons systems, troop morale, or movement by air during this battle.

a. Terrain (OCOKA).

(1) Observation and fire.

The American scheme for containment of German forces at Faid was centered upon the key terrain features of Djebel Ksaira to the south and Djebel Lessouda to the north. Artillery observation posts on both hills provided visual coverage of the exits from Faid Pass and of the road from Maknassy to the south.

The troops on the heights were only able to influence the battle on the plain around them by their observation and adjustment of artillery. The plan resulted in rigidity and the artillery was left unprotected on the valley floor. 4

(2) Concealment and cover.

Concealment and cover was limited in the battle area. With the exception of the wadis, the terrain was flat providing good long range acquisition. Fast moving vehicles raised dust which gave away positions and added to recognition problems. Trees could be found in irrigated groves in and around the town of Sidi bou Zid. Due to a lack of cover and concealment the American forces suffered casualties from frequent German air attacks.

(3) Obstacles.

With the exception of isolated minefields which had been emplaced by the American engineers, very few man made obstacles were employed during the battle.

Sand became a natural obstacle to the German forces as they attempted to push through the Maizila Pass. When forced to deploy from the roads, sand slowed their movement.

(4) Key terrain.

Key terrain was identified as the hills of Lessouda and Ksaira. These hills were identified as "islands of resistance." 5 Unfortunately, the occupation of these hills by American infantry robbed them of their mobility. The two locations were separated by such a great distance that mutual support was not possible with the organic weapons available.

The occupation of these two hills by the American infantry proved to be an unforeseen stroke of luck for the attacking German forces. Each position was quickly surrounded during the battle, and the surviving Americans were required to break out and attempt to evade the Germans during the hours of darkness. During the breakout attempts large numbers of American soldiers were captured.

The American commander, Major General Fredendall, and his staff had apparently never reconnoitered the terrain they elected to defend, even though senior officers of the 1st Armored Division had expressed some doubts about the plan.

(5) Avenues of approach.

The two avenues of approach available to the Germans were along roads leading through the Faid Pass and the Maizila Pass. 6 These two avenues were large enough to accommodate attacking forces once they had cleared the passes. Trafficability off the existing roads was not much of a problem, but some delays could be expected when large wadis cut across the route of march. This situation could dramatically change however if significant rainfall occurred. Off road trafficability would then be a nightmare of mud and rain swollen wadis.

While in the passes constriction of the avenues presented a lucrative target for interdiction by artillery or aircraft, but the quick dispersal of forces could be easily accomplished once through the passes.

2. IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVES OF EACH ANTAGONIST.

a. Missions of Opposing Forces.

Axis Forces:

The mission of the Axis Forces was to cut through the Dorsals, take Le Kef and to continue northward to the Mediterranean, isolating the Allied forces facing Tunis and Bizerte. The 10th Panzer was to attack Sidi bou Zid directly through Faid Pass. The 21st Panzer would emerge from Maizala Pass, swing behind US positions at Sidi bou Zid and strike from the rear.

Allied Forces:

The mission of the Allied Forces was to prevent a linkup of the two Axis armies. Specifically they were to hold the mountain passes in the Eastern Dorsales and conduct limited offensive action to the East in order to sever Rommel's communications with the Axis forces to the North.

b. Immediate Objectives Selected.

Axis Forces:

The objective of the attack was not agreed upon by the two armies involved (the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions along with the division sized element from the Deutsche Afrika Korps of Panzer Armee Afrika). It was generally hoped that a severe blow could be dealt to the green American units from which they would be slow to recover.

Allied Forces:

The ultimate objectives was to expell the Axis powers from Africa. At the time of the battle of Sidi bou Zid, the objective was to seize back most of the ground lost to the Axis in Central and southern Tunisia in order to pave the way for a major offensive in March.

c. Relationship of Immediate Objectives to Strategic and Tactical Goals.

Axis Forces:

The Axis forces succeeded in their efforts to throw the Allies off balance; to drive through to the coast; and to prolong the eventual showdown in Tunisia by several months. This was consistent with their strategy of preserving their line of communication to the Algerian oilfields.

Allied Forces:

The British had argued that the conquest of North Africa would provide a base from which to invade the soft underbelly of Europe; it would eliminate the Nazi Vichy-French governments control of Algeria; it would free the vital Mediterranean Sea lanes; it would relieve pressure on the British 8th Army defending the Suez canal; and it would draw German air strengths from the Russian front. Inasmuch as the Allied forces had cut Rommel off from his supplies in northern Tunisia, their objectives were consistent with strategic and tactical goals.

Sidi bou Zid

Part III - Opposing Forces

1. STRENGTH AND COMPOSITION.

a. Friendly forces.

(1) The British First Army.

(a) Organization (see figure 3-1). 7

(b) Discussion. German defenses had stopped the allied offensive. Allied forces were on the defensive all across the front, bringing up supplies and reinforcements while preparing to resume the offensive. A British Corps was in the north, XIX French Corps in the center and II U.S. Corps was defending in the south. The allies expected a German counteroffensive to fall on the center of the allied line and consequently thickened defenses there. 8

(2) The II Corps.

(a) Organization (see figure 3-2). 9

(b) II Corps, the southernmost of the three allied corps in line, was not expected to have to bear the enemy's main attack. II Corps received orders to protect the flank of XIX Corps, to the north where the main attack was expected, and to defend in sector. II Corps consisted of 1st AD(-), the 168th RCT, a British armored cavalry regiment and Force Walvert (miscellaneous French units comprising approximately one division in strength). In its sector, II Corps determined that the enemy's most likely avenue of approach was through Faid Pass to Sidi bou Zid. II Corps' most powerful unit, the 1st Armored Division (-), reinforced by most of the infantry from the 168th RCT, was assigned to this sector. The remainder of II Corps forces were given screening missions to the Corps front and southern sector. II Corps did not establish a corps reserve per se. Some engineer, tank destroyer, and infantry units assigned to rear area security were expected to double as corps reserve until British First Army reserves could be shifted from the north to help.

10

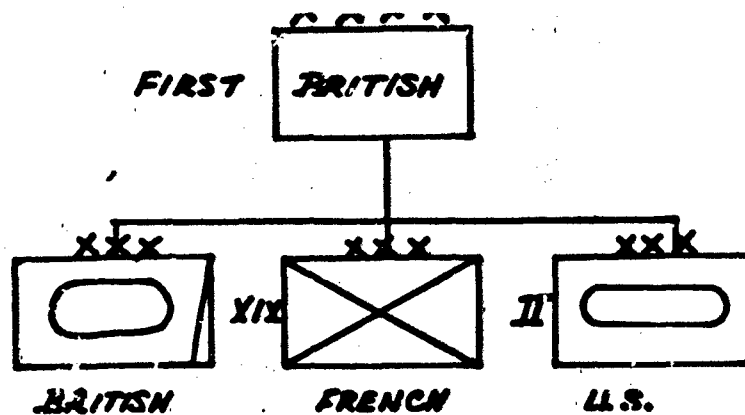


FIGURE 31 - ORGANIZATION OF THE BRITISH 1ST ARMY

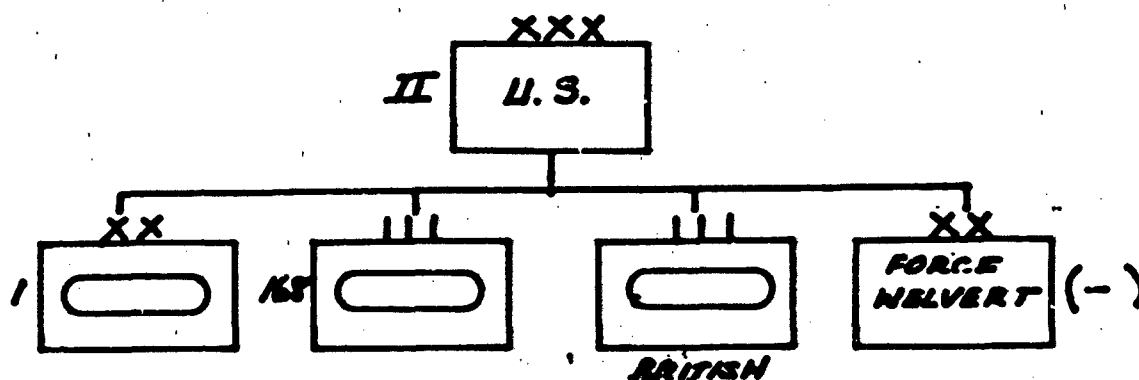


FIGURE 32 - ORGANIZATION OF II (U.S.) CORPS

(3) The 1st Armored Division.

(a) Task Organization on 14 February (see figure 3-3). 11

(b) Discussion. The 1st Armored Division had only two combat command (CC) headquarters. Combat Command C was built around an existing battalion headquarters - possibly the 701st Tank Destroyer (TD) battalion. It was placed in line with the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB) to assist in guarding the divisions southern flank. 66B Combat Command B (CCB) was detached to Army reserve while CCA occupied the most likely avenue of approach - the area around Sidi bou Zid. The division reserve consisted of one light tank battalion and one armored infantry battalion. In addition to the three maneuver battalions lost to army reserve in CCB, two maneuver battalions were in the force screening the corps southern flank, and one additional battalion was in the Army rear area conducting rear area security operations. So out of a possible 13 maneuver battalions, 1st AD had only seven with which to defend in its sector. 12

(4) Combat Command A.

(a) Task Organization (see figure 3-4). 13

(b) Discussion. CCA had virtually no options in terms of its size, its dispositions or in the development of its defensive plan. Its size, sector, and positioning had been prescribed by the II Corps commander. He directed that one infantry heavy battalion combat team be placed on the northern hill, a reinforced infantry battalion on the southern hill, and that a reinforced armor battalion be held in reserve. Task Force Waters (2-168) was positioned on the northern hill (Dj Lessouda) while TF 3-168 was placed on the southern hill (Dj Ksaira). Unfortunately, the corps commander and his staff did not appreciate the terrain. The two hills were approximately eight kilometers apart and not mutually supporting. The planned battalion strongpoints were in actuality two isolated outposts. The Commander of CCA made some adjustments to the plan by patrolling with infantry between the hills at night and occupying blocking positions with armor during the day. 14

b. Enemy Forces.

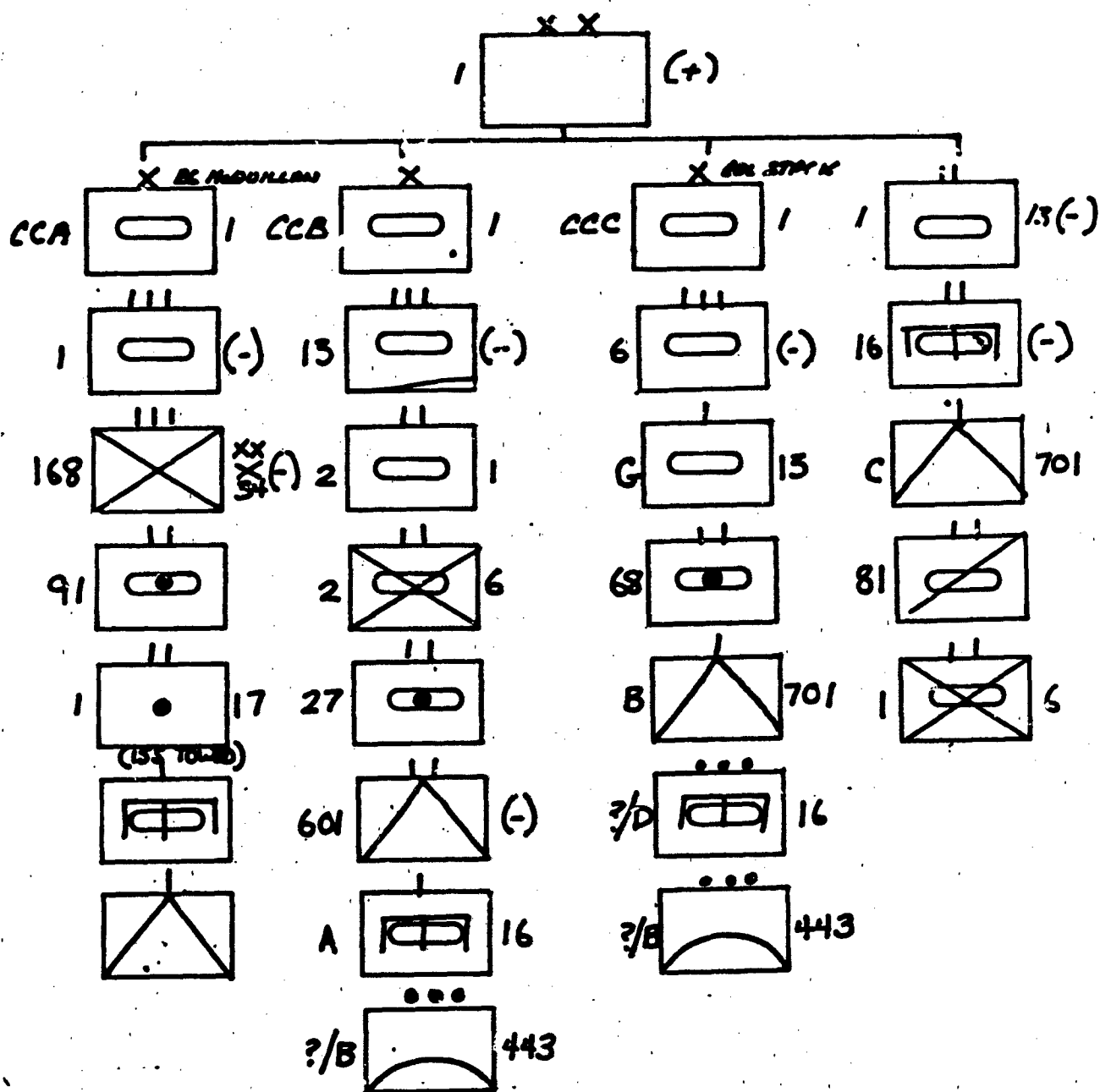


FIGURE 3-3 - TASK ORGANIZATION OF 1ST ARMORED DIVISION

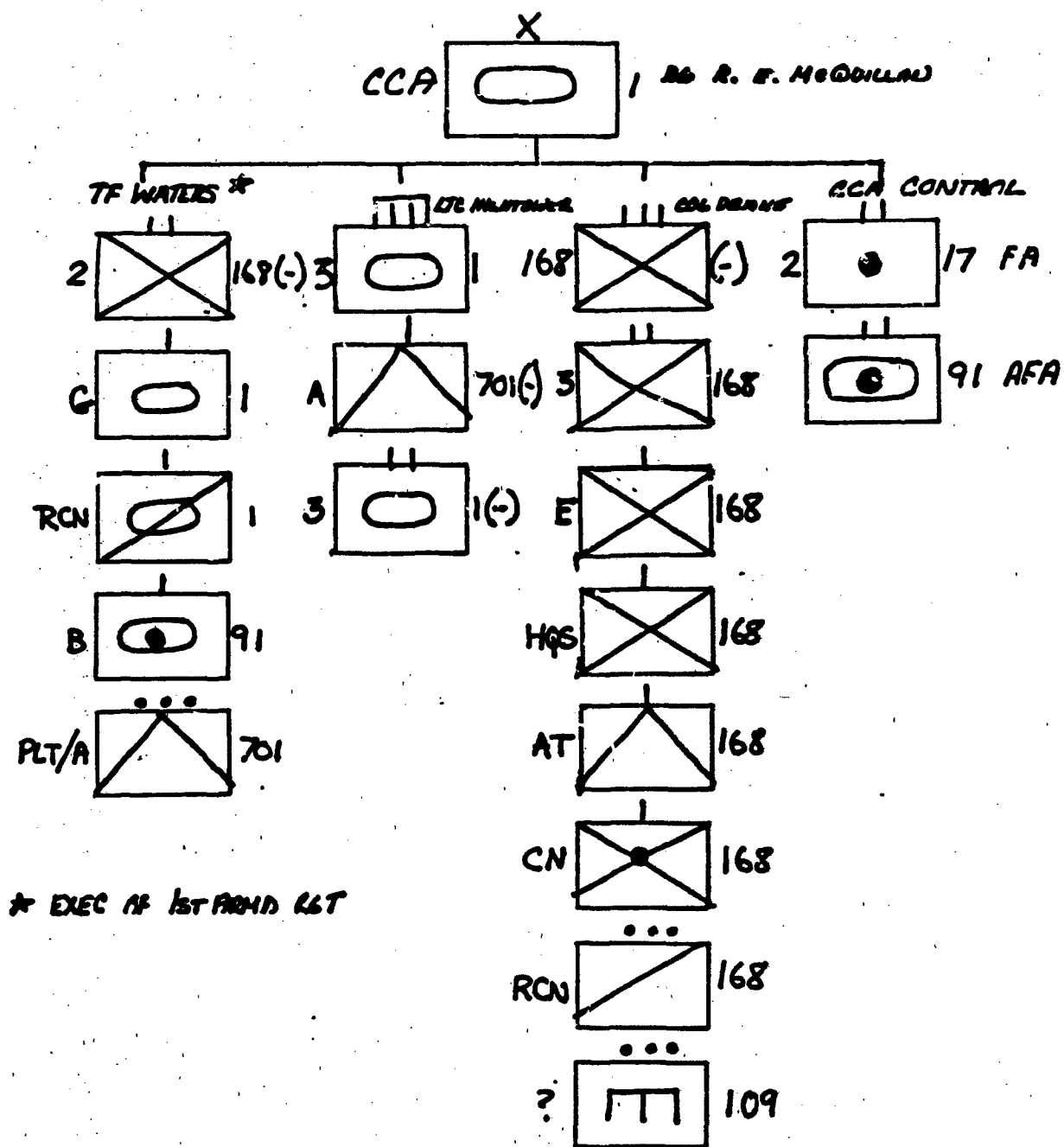


FIGURE 34 - TASK ORGANIZATION CCA

(1) The German 5th Panzer Army.

(a) Organization (see figure 3-5). 15

(b) Discussion. Field Marshall Albert Kesserling was the overall commander of Axis forces in the Mediterranean. General Juergan Van Arnim commanded the Fifth Panzer Army. He placed General Heinz Zeigler, his deputy, in direct command of FRUELINGSWIND- the pincer operation at Sidi bou Zid. Ziegler's force included more than two hundred tanks, half tracks and guns. 16

(2) The 10th Panzer Division.

(a) Organization (see figure 3-6).

(b) Discussion. The 10th Panzer Division was a proud and veteran formation. It had long years of experience in France and Russia before arriving in Africa. The 10th's mission was to attack Sidi bou Zid through Faid Pass. For this battle, the division would consist of four maneuver battalions.

(3) The 21st Panzer Division.

(a) Organization (see figure 3-7).

(b) Discussion. The 21st Panzer Division had been the first German division in Africa and had perhaps more desert experience than any other unit on either side. The 21st Panzer Division had a mission to attack through Maizla Pass, about 15 miles to the south of Faid Pass, and attack Sidi bou Zid from the rear. For this battle, the division consisted of seven maneuver battalions.

2. TECHNOLOGY.

The most sophisticated weaponry of both forces was employed in the battle at Sidi bou Zid. Unfortunately for the Allied forces, German weaponry and "how to fight" doctrine was superior. The German desert battle experience had taught them to take fullest advantage of the weather and terrain to close with and destroy allied forces. Additionally, their experience in working land forces (infantry and armor) and air forces in combined operations helped to make them even more effective against allied forces in their

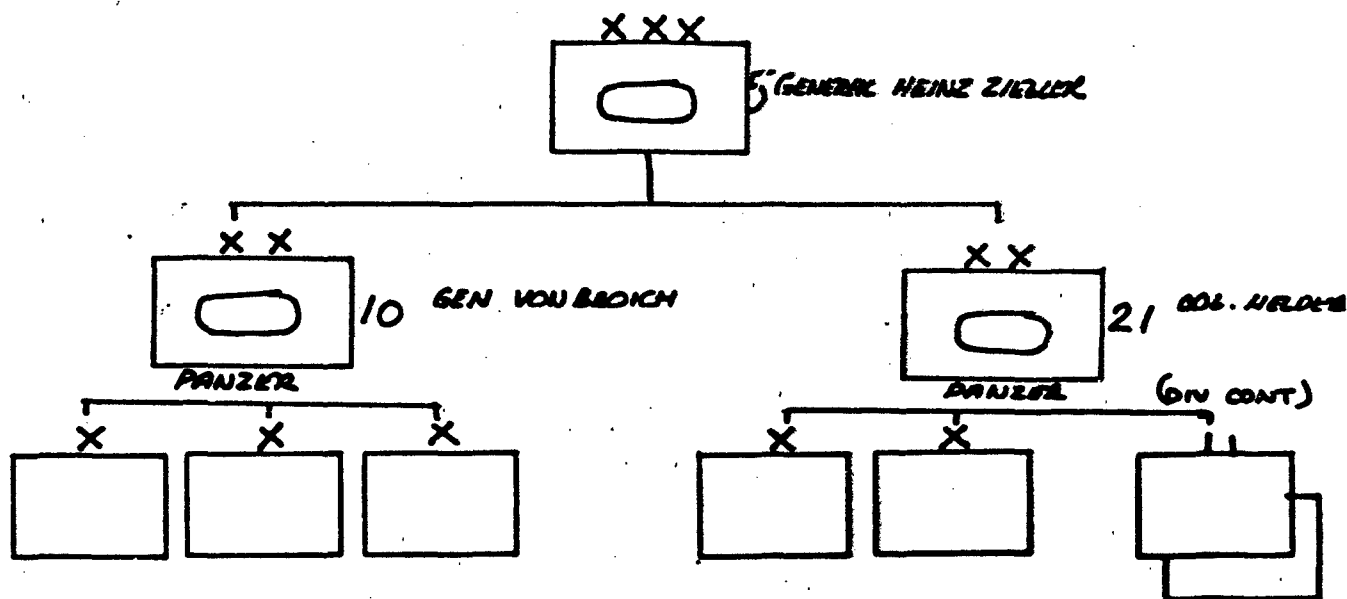


FIGURE 3-5 - ORGANIZATION OF GERMAN 5TH PANZER ARMY

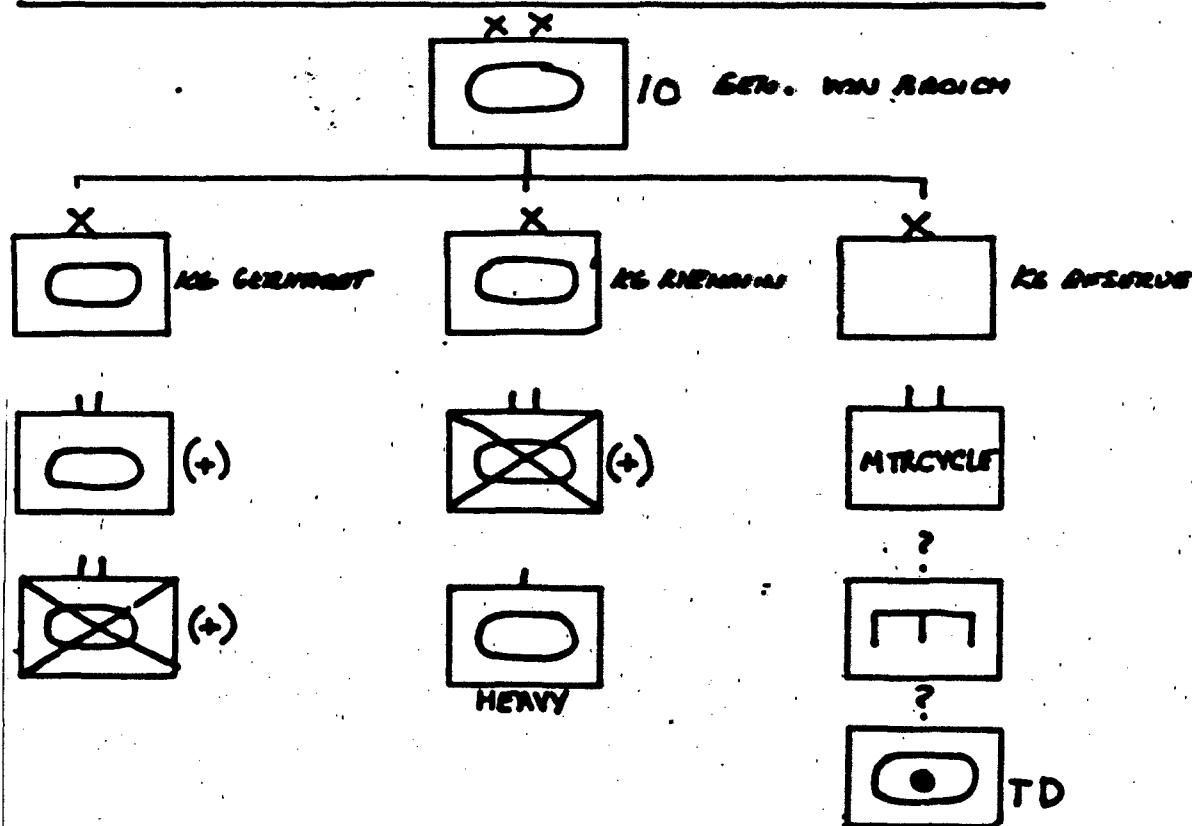


FIGURE 3-6 - ORGANIZATION OF THE 10TH PANZER DIVISION

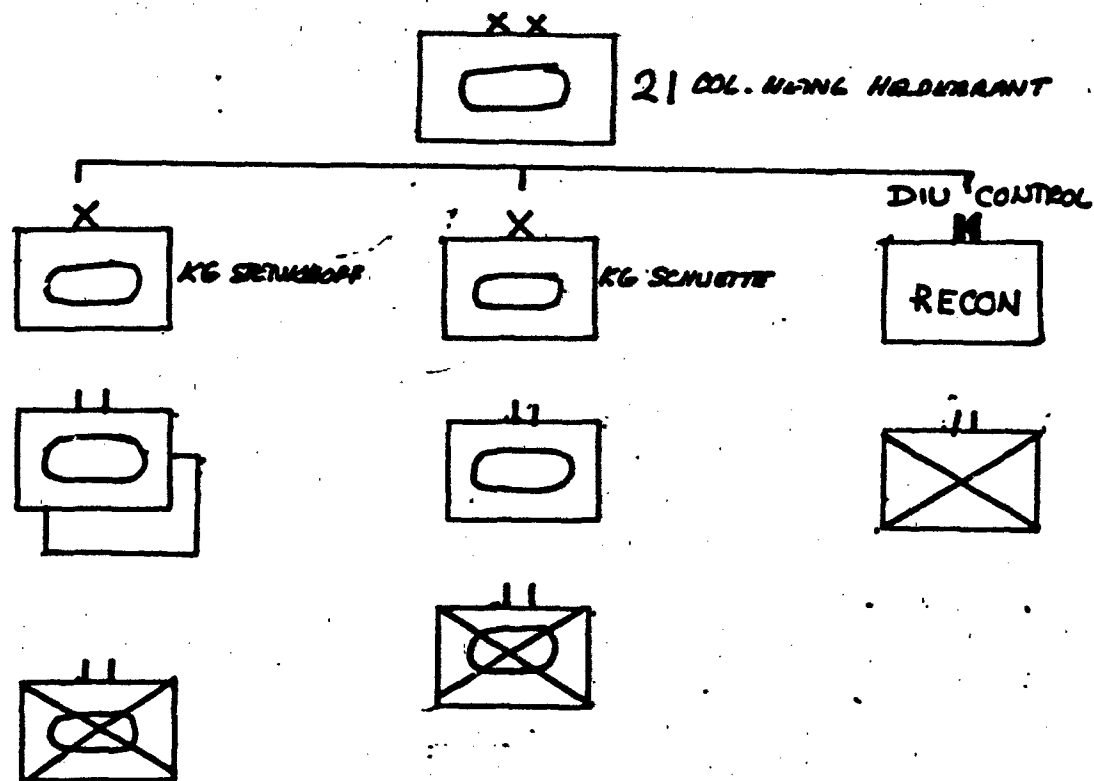


FIGURE 37 - 21ST PANZER DIVISION

initial engagements. But, perhaps the most significant advantages owned by the Germans in the battle at Sidi bou Zid was in their tank weapon systems - especially in the Tiger tank. It had a larger caliber main gun which fired a higher velocity round from greater distances than American or British tanks. The German tank also gave its crew better protection than Allied tank crews in terms of armor thickness and in the capability to fire from more of a defilade position in a wider target range than the American M3 General Grant Tank or even their new M4 Sherman tank - which was being issued during the battle. 17

The M3, as previously stated, was a much inferior tank. Its 75mm gun could not penetrate the armor of a Tiger tank at the ranges being fought. Its traverse was so limited that it could only fire in the direction in which it was facing. More over, the gun was set so low that almost the whole tank had to be exposed before it could be brought to bear on a target. There was no slope on the side armor and the .30 caliber gun in the cupola, which was for defense against aircraft, was worse than useless. The highly volatile gasoline fuel, vulnerability of fuel tanks and position of escape hatches made the tank a literal iron coffin for its crew. The tank was extremely vulnerable against German tanks in any situation whether it be the defense, a running tank battle or a withdrawal.

The M4 Sherman tank was a great improvement technologically over the M3 Grant tank. It greatly improved upon most of the shortcomings noted in the M3 except for the problem of dependence on volatile gasoline for fuel. Unfortunately, tactical employment or techniques to fight the still superior German tanks had not yet evolved when the battle at Sidi bou Zid was fought. LTC Louis V. Hightower's tank battalion (CCA reserve force) was completely outfitted with the new M4 Sherman tank prior to his counterattack to rescue the isolated forces on Dj Lfessouda and Dj Ksaira. But, even though the Sherman tank was nearly a technological match to the German tank, the tactics were not. Hightower's force was ambushed and almost totally destroyed in a matter of a couple of hours of fighting. 18 It was not until later in the battle for Kasserine Pass that the Allied forces altered their tactical approach to combat with the Germans.

This battle at Sidi bou Zid went to the Axis forces because of their technological advantage in the

main weapon system employed, the tank, and because of their skillful ability to employ combined arms forces. The Germans knew the capabilities of their weapons systems and had learned how to maximize those capabilities. The Allied forces, especially the Americans who were the Allied combatants in this battle, had not yet learned how to differentiate "parade ground" and "map bound" tactics from actual "battle ground" tactics. In the final analysis, this weakness had a far greater impact on their defeat than did their shortcomings in the technological arena.

3. LOGISTICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS.

a. Friendly Forces.

Preinvasion planning had projected Tunisia as a British theatre of operations. This included the entire line of supply in concept, organization and control. Since each Allied force was unfamiliar with the manner in which other Allied forces operated, many unexpected difficulties were encountered. Political considerations, differing national interests, and language barriers compounded logistical problems. Fortunately American forces had seen limited action since their arrival in North Africa in November of 1942. This allowed time for their movement to defensive positions in the Kasserine Pass area and limited build up of badly needed supplies prior to the battle at Sidi bou Zid. 19

A basic deficiency existed in transportation. The narrow gauge railroad between Constantine (Eisenhower's forward command post) and Tebessa, the main supply depot for the American forces in Tunisia, could carry only about one third of the daily requirements of the II Corps. Truck convoys supplemented the railway, but by the end of January, the six thousand trucks were mechanically worn out or deadlined for spare parts. A loss of a single vehicle became almost a tragedy to the logistical planners. The II Corps was suffering acute shortages in all types of equipment. There were shortages of spare tanks, binoculars, machine guns, repair parts, assemblies such as engines, transmissions, starters, generators, headlights, tire patches and much more. 20

At the beginning of February, Eisenhower created a

Services of Supply organization to handle the complicated aspects of logistics and supply for American forces. But not until March was the organization effective enough to support the U.S. troops stationed in Tunisia - too late for the battle at Sidi bou Zid. 21

In the II Corps, resupply policy was from the rear depot at Tebessa to the front units near Sidi bou Zid, a distance of approximately 100 miles. In actuality resupply was more frequently laterally by section because trucks could not reach the units on Dj Ksaira or Dj Lessouda. 22 Resupply of those units, as it turned out, was not a significant factor in them being encircled and abandoned during the battle. In fact, the forces of CCA had received several truck loads of ammunition and some brand new bazookas (weapons which no one had ever fired) on Saturday the 13th of February. 23

CCA had also received a shipment of two hundred replacement troops only a couple of days prior to the battle but they could hardly be considered an asset. Each man arrived carrying two heavy barracks bags full of clothing and personal belongings. Some lacked weapons, some had never fired a rifle, none had entrenching tools or bayonets, and many were not even trained. The arrivals were sent to Drake who had them distributed out among the companies on Dj Ksaira. 24

b. Enemy forces.

The German forces were veterans in the North African theatre. They had learned to survive in spite of their long lines of communications and shortage of supply. They had become masterful scavengers of the desert. They recovered their own damaged equipment from the battlefield even as the war was being fought. Tanks immobilized but capable of firing were towed by other tanks during the battle while others were put back into service as quickly as possible or, if not repairable, stripped down and cannabilized for repair parts. Additionally, the Germans made the maximum possible use out of captured supplies and equipment.

Intelligence reports indicated that the German force was staged for at least three days east of the Faid Pass waiting for favorable weather conditions. That time provided ample opportunity for them to refit

and rearm prior to their attack.

c. Impact.

Victory was so quick that logistical and Administrative systems had little impact on the outcome of the initial battle at Sidi bou Zid for either Allied or Axis forces. Even the best resupply systems of the day could not have prevented the Axis victory or the encirclement of American forces on Dj Lessouda or Dj Dsaira. But, had the newer M4 Sherman tank, bazookas and other items of equipment been supplied in the quantities needed early enough from the Industrial base of the U.S. to allow proper training, perhaps the counter attack would have turned out differently, and the American forces on Lessouda and Dsaira would not have had to have been abandoned.

4. COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS.

a. Command and Control.

Unquestionably, the dominant character in this battle was the II Corps commander, MG Lloyd R. Fredendall. His dislike for the British First Army commander served to foster an alienation between British and American Forces in the theater. While his hatred or loathing of the French was probably the cause for his not assigning a mission to French forces attached to II Corps. 25 But, perhaps even more detrimental, was his personal distrust of General Ward, 1st Armored Division commander. This distrust resulted in him preparing and issuing the battle plan to the 1st Armored Division Combat Commands without any involvement or input from MG Ward or his staff. The plan literally froze 1st Armored Division units to the desert floor and left almost no opportunity for improvisation or planning at lower levels. Only a small reserve was maintained. 26

Fredendall intended to control the battle over land lines (field wire) of communications from his headquarters approximately sixty miles west of Sidi bou Zid. Fredendall's personality and style had severely strained his relationships with higher and lower echelons. His battle plan was poorly thought out resulting in weakly organized forward positions on Dj Ksaira and Dj Lessouda along with a reserve too weak

and too far from the forward employed forces to be of consequence in the battle. 27

Ward, and McQuillan (CCA Commander) attempted to make the best of a bad situation. Since the two forward positions were not mutually supporting, they planned for infantry to patrol the area between the hills at night and for tanks to occupy fighting positions during the day. They had troops on the hills dig in strong defensive positions as best they could and they prepared plans for employment of the reserves under LTC Hightower. 28 Command relationships from the division commander down to the units were healthy with mutual respect being rendered between commanders. Ward was aware of Fredendall's method of direct contact with the Combat Commanders but did not allow it to affect his relationship with his subordinate commanders. 29

b. Communications.

Communications were limited. The primary means was by field wire but it took a great amount of resources to install - especially since the corps commander's headquarters was so far away. Additionally, the life expectancy of wire could be as little as three days if uninsulated. 30 Radio communications were used during the battle. However, the shortage of batteries, 31 the number of people who had access to radios (usually only commanders and artillery FO's), and their restricted range limited their value in controlling maneuver forces. If the commanders radio failed or if his tank was hit, manual signals had to be utilized. The poor communications often resulted in long delays in getting important information to the II Corps and 1st Army Commanders. The result was that decisions were made too late to allow the forces on Dj Ksaira and Dj Lessouda to withdraw to alternate defensive positions. 32

Communications security was practiced to some degree - at least by Fredendall. An example of a message he telephoned to CCB is: "Move your command, that is, the walking boys, pop guns, Baker's outfit and the outfit which is the reverse of Baker's outfit and the big fellows to M, which is due north of where you are now, as soon as possible. Have your boss report to the French gentleman whose name begins with J at a place which begins with D which is five grid squares to the left of M." 33

c. Intelligence.

American perceptions of the British 1st Army commander, LTG Anderson, as being too conservative and pessimistic, were entirely accurate when discussing his handling of intelligence data. Early intelligence information indicated that the enemy forces in Tunisia would use the lull in activity to attack and defeat the British First Army before allied units could be reinforced. The Intelligence Estimate suggested that the attack would fall on the XIX French Corps - the center of the British First Army line. Anderson thickened this part of the front and positioned his reserve of a British Armored Division and a U.S. Combat Command where they could be used quickly in the battle. 35 Unfortunately, even though later intelligence gathered by Fredendall's intelligence officer indicated that the attack would be in the southern sector, Anderson refused to recognize or even discuss the possibility of an attack in the South. Anderson's faulty belief and insistence that the attack would be in the center sector had a critical effect on the operation. The Army reserve forces were too far away to be employed in II Corps sector before the battle at Sidi bou Zid would be lost. Even after Ward's 1st Armored Division suffered defeat Anderson refused to believe the main attack would be in the southern sector, and reluctantly released only CCB from Army reserve to reinforce II Corps as it withdrew towards Sbeitla. 36

Intelligence collection assets were essentially the same in both Allied and Axis forces. Each side utilized reconnaissance foot patrols, reconnaissance flights, observation from high terrain features, interrogation of prisoners of war, questioning of refugees and host nation laborers, observation of artillery fires, monitoring of communications etc. Primitive or unsophisticated as some of those means may seem by today's standard, each side obtained accurate data on the other. For example, the II Corps intelligence officer compiled an impressive body of evidence from sources like those previously listed to accurately predict that the German main attack would be in the II Corps sector. 37 Likewise, the German intelligence collection effort was complete enough for them to not only know the location of Allied forces on Dj Ksaira and Dj Lessouda but that the positions were

not mutually supporting. They were also able to time an air strike on CCA's reserve force just as it was readying to counterattack. 38

The greatest allied shortcoming in the area of intelligence seems to have been in Anderson's refusal to seek and use intelligence information wisely. Had he done so, perhaps the forces on Dj Ksaira and Dj Lessouda need not have been abandoned.

6. TRAINING AND DOCTRINE.

a. Friendly Forces.

By American standards, the overall combat effectiveness of allied units was judged to be high, but in actuality the tactical doctrine and training techniques of allied forces at Sid bou Zid were primitive in comparison with their German foe. Many of the practices and concepts were of World War I vintage. Americans were still relatively new to the theatre and had not yet learned to fight effectively in the deserts of North Africa. They had not learned how to effectively employ combined arms forces including integrating air force assets. Some lesser experienced commanders even used parade ground tactics to attack a defending enemy. 39 While these tactics looked to be as impressive as a field of British Colonial redcoats marching to battle, it proved to be just as deadly. The German's would lay in wait with their larger caliber, higher velocity weapons and quickly destroy allied forces employed in such a manner. Unfortunately for the 1st Armored Division, it was not until after the battle at Sidi bou Zid that American tactics changed to counter the threat capabilities. Fredendall's conscious decision to alter doctrinal policy of decentralized command and control caused the American force to lose the battle more quickly than it might otherwise have done. Rather than allowing Ward the opportunity to prepare for the fight in his own sector, Fredendall prescribed the composition, disposition and emplacement of Ward's units. He did so without surveying the terrain the unit was directed to occupy. 40 The result was that two of Ward's units were isolated approximately 100 miles to the front of the II Corps Headquarters and 10 miles apart from each other. They could not be supported by each other or

by the few division units left under Ward's control. The U.S. doctrine for a strong continuous mutually supporting defense was more like isolated outposts in the desert. 41

Allied forces were considered trained in the use of weapons systems in their possession at the start of the battle. However, as personnel and equipment replacements arrived the situation worsened. Many of the replacements had never fired a personal weapon. Let alone received training on equipment like tanks, tank destroyers, or artillery. The issuance of the M4 tank to replace the M3 losses, also created some problems, because even the experienced tankers at Sidi bou Zid had never trained with or even seen the new Sherman tank. 42

b. Enemy forces.

The Germans had the benefit of experience from several years in combat against a number of different opponents. They had reduced tank, infantry and air ground cooperation to a science. 43 The only combined arms weakness they exhibited was that of not tying their artillery to their ground maneuver as effectively as they had done with other arms. The Germans used the natural camouflage of the blowing desert sands expertly to mask their movement to the offensive on Valentine's Day. They also used the wadies and cactus patches to hide in or behind while waiting to ambush unsuspecting American forces during the battle at Sidi bou Zid. 44 The Germans had adopted a "creeping tactic" when maneuvering during periods of good visibility. This slow movement kept the dust down and made it difficult for Allied forces to adjust fire on them enabling them to acquire targets of their own. 45

7. CONDITION AND MORALE.

American troops had left the United States with the full support of their country. Newspapers were filled with headlines indicating the success of American heroes abroad. 46 Such was the case with the US II Corps under the command of Fredendall. II Corps invasion landed them at Oran in November, where they performed superbly, seizing their objectives in less than three days. From Oran they moved to join the British First Army in vicinity of Kasserine. Most of II Corps' units experienced limited battle action and

what they had experienced was considered highly successful by their leaders. 47 Therefore, troop morale was high, discipline was good, troops believed in what they were fighting for and they had confidence in their leaders. Only one half of one percent of the mail spot checked by censorship authorities contained indications of poor morale. In general those complaints were about the mail service which took six to eight weeks for delivery. 48 The willingness of the soldiers to hold at all costs and their ability to fight to the end at Kasaira, Lessouda, and during counter attacks attest to the condition and morale of the soldiers in the 1st Armored Division.

8. LEADERSHIP.

a. Friendly forces.

The personality traits of the major commanders involved probably had as great an impact on the initial defeat of the US 1st Armored Division and subsequent encirclement of subordinate forces as any other single consideration. 49

(1) The British 1st Army Commander - LTG K.A.N. Anderson. From the early planning stages, Tunisia was projected to be a British theatre of operation composed of British, French and American forces. LTG Dwight D. Eisenhower had hoped for a truly allied command, but what he had was more of a loose coalition. While Eisenhower could direct that American forces be placed under command of LTG Anderson's first Army, the French were unwilling to serve under British command. The French national jealousies and wariness of the British prevented them from submitting their forces to be commanded by another nationality. The American leaders in North Africa thought Anderson to be too conservative, secretive, and pessimistic. The result was that Eisenhower himself would exercise direct command of the three nation force, even though he was some 400 miles from the front. Eisenhower, realizing that he was too far from the front to effectively command and control the three nation force, established a forward command post under control of his chief of staff, but it was too far from the front to be of any consequence. Therefore, LTG Anderson became Eisenhower's advisor and forward commander for the entire Tunisian front. He was charged with monitoring and coordinating the combat forces but he never took

charge. 50

(2) MG Lloyd R. Fredendall - MG Fredendall was known as a brassy, outspoken, imprecise in speech corps commander, who had a firm opinion on every subject. He personally disliked Anderson and apparently had little understanding of the British procedures for emplacement of forces. Furthermore, Fredendall had no confidence in and little patience with the French. He was outspoken in his opinions of allied forces and was inclined to be critical of superiors and subordinates alike. But, of all his characteristics, perhaps the most fatal to the 1st Armored Division was his air of finality (he knew best, and there was little anyone could tell him); his perceptibly excessive emphasis on security and safety of his command post, which he located far to the rear and seldom left to visit the front; and his open dislike for and reluctance to allow the 1st Armored Division Commander the opportunity to command. 51

(3) MG Orlando Ward - MG Ward was described as quiet in speech and manner, methodical, thorough, competent, and held in high esteem by his men. He had no use for Fredendall and considered Fredendall's direct dealings with the 1st AD combat commands to be a contemptuous disregard of his own prerogatives. Although Ward would do all that he could to insure his division accomplished the mission assigned by Fredendall, their mutual dislike stopped healthy communication exchanges between them and caused serious repercussions to the 1st AD. 52

(4) BG Raymond E. McQuillan - CCA Commander, BG McQuillan was tactically well-schooled and a responsible commander, but he had little experience in the North African theater. He was quick to recognize the problems inherent in Fredendall's plan that had been thrust upon him. In an attempt to maintain some contact between his forces on Dj Ksaira and Dj Lessouda, he required aggressive patrolling during hours of darkness and blocking positions were manned at night. During the fight he quickly made some sound decisions to protect his forces. Additionally he had some early requests for withdrawal which were denied. 53

(5) LTC John K. Waters - 2-168 (TF WATERS) commander, Waters, executive officer of the 1st AD, was described as being an ever-ready, courteous, quiet and meticulous man. He had placed a small covering force

in the plain below Lessouda to provide early warning should an attack occur in his sector. The covering force was overrun before it could warn Waters and Waters himself was captured early in the battle. Maj. Robert R. Moore, who had virtually no command experience, took responsibility for TF WATERS. The unit fought on until orders were received for them to try to make it back to friendly lines as best they could. Approximately 300 men made it to safety. 54

(6) COL Thomas D. Drake - 168th Inf Regt commander, Drake was known to be confident, aggressive and a formidable disciplinarian. His request to withdraw from the djebel was denied-- apparently because no-one at corps understood the scale of the enemy assault. Once surrounded, he knew he had only one option open to him; to stick it out until help came to rescue his 1600 man force. Help never came, his forces fought on until their ammunitions ran out and they were killed or captured. 55

b. Enemy forces.

Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, overall commander of German forces in the Mediterranean, had two veteran soldiers with strong personalities but dissimilar ideas about how to fight the war in Tunisia. One, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, whose forces were withdrawing from Tripoli to meet up with those of the Fifth Panzer Army, wanted to move swiftly and strike deep into the rear of Allied forces and to make them withdraw. The other, General Juergan Von Arnim, commander of the Fifth Panzer Army, contemplated a more limited thrust designed to turn the flank of the British First Army, and throwing it back to delay and disrupt allied plans. These conflicting views were never reconciled and led to friction between the two leaders. Arnim won out over Rommel. He placed the veteran 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions under command of General Heinz Ziegler. The 10th Panzer Division was to attack Sidi bou Zid directly through the Faid Pass, while the the 21st Panzer Division attacked through Maizla Pass, about 15 miles to the south, and struck Allied forces at Sidi bou Zid from the rear. 56

The leaders and soldiers were experienced, battle hardened soldiers who executed the pincer movement quickly and professionally. However, the conservative nature of Arnim and his plan failed to take full advantage of Axis advances through exploitation of

routed allied forces. That failure, on two occasions during the battle at Sidi bou Zid, allowed Allied forces to consolidate and reconstruct forces even though they lost heavily in the initial fighting, including the two large forces on Dj Lessouda and Dj Ksaira. 57

Kesserling acknowledged the fact that the battle in central Tunisia had been fought and perhaps lost because he didn't have a unified command structure there. To correct the situation, on 22 Feb. 1943, he established an army group headquarters under Rommel in hopes that some of the difficulties arising from internal friction could be resolved. 58

c. Synopsis.

The years of experience fighting in France, Russia, and Africa gave the German leaders and their soldiers a decided advantage over the Allied forces. Not only were Axis forces experienced and battle hardened. They had refined their combined arms tactical employment on the ground and integrated into it the power of the Luftwaffe from the air. In addition to their combat leadership and tactical employment experience, the Germans enjoyed a technological equipment advantage. These combined factors made for an easy initial victory at Sidi bou Zid; however, the failure of Arnim to exploit the success allowed Allied forces the opportunity to regroup quickly, reestablish their defenses, and block the German advance. Oddly enough, it was the inflexibility of Anderson to change his First Army defense plans, and the inflexibility of Fredendall to allow Ward to fight the battle, which appears to have contributed significantly to the early defeat of Allied forces at Sidi bou Zid.

9. FEASIBLE COURSES OF ACTION:

a. What were the courses of action available to the opposing commanders? Did these courses of action lend themselves to the accomplishment of the mission?

Axis forces:

Courses of action included: (1) Striking at Allied Forces in Western Tunisia, forcing the Allies back to Algeria. (2) Consolidating the German hold on

the Eastern Dorsales. (3) A combination of the two - holding the Eastern Dorsales , then sweeping toward Tebessa.

Allied forces:

The Allies were limited to the defensive positions in the Eastern Dorsales. To withdraw from them would mean having to fight for them again in the Spring because possession of the mountain passes was a prerequisite for launching any general offensive.

b. Were the courses of action feasible? Did the commanders have the capacity to perform the contemplated action?

Axis forces:

The Axis forces had the capacity to perform any of the courses of action.

Allied forces:

The Allied Forces had the capacity to perform their chosen course of action, but it was not achieved because of faulty intelligence, poor leadership, and differences between the multi-national forces.

c. Did opposing commanders fully utilize the estimate of the situation in their decision making process based on the circumstances and time available?

Axis forces:

Yes.

Allied forces:

Yes.

d. Were staff estimates and recommendations considered in the estimate of the situation?

Axis forces:

General Kesselring summoned both of this commanders to a meeting to hear their viewpoints. He settled on a compromise course of action of holding the

Eastern Drosals, and then sweeping toward Tebessa.

Allied forces:

Staff estimates were used; however, a faulty estimate caused the Allies to deploy incorrectly. In addition, MG Fredendall directed the placement of troops without first-hand information and without benefit of the on-the-scene commander's recommendation.

e. Did the commanders and their staffs consider METT-T in their selection of the courses of action?

Axis forces:

Yes.

Allied forces:

MG Fredendall failed to appreciate the terrain. He and his staff assumed that the hill masses were mutually supporting when in fact they were two isolated geographic formations. In fact, the area to be covered was too large for the number of troops available.

f. Did the antagonists consider the relative combat power of the opposing forces in the selection of courses of action?

Axis forces:

Yes.

Allied forces:

The Allies failed to appreciate the numbers of troops opposing them. Poor intelligence failed to identify habitual relationships; hence, intelligence officers under-estimated the size and number of German units and failed to realize that they were severely outnumbered.

SIDI BOU ZID

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Sidi bou Zid

Part IV - Battle Description

The Allies invaded North Africa in November 1942 under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower with the initial intent of driving eastward to capture the Tunisian ports of Bizerte and Tunis (figure 4-1). This strategy was intended to cut the supply lines of the Afrika Korps which led from Tunisia to Egypt. Logistical, tactical, and other problems prevented this objective from being accomplished, and by February 1943 the Allied forces, now referred to as the British First Army, had stalled in their offensive effort and found themselves on the defensive in an attempt to bring up supplies and reinforcements prior to resuming the offense.

The German forces in Tunisia had by this time been reinforced by Rommel's army which had just returned from Egypt. Rommel's intent was to defeat the British First Army prior to its resupply and reinforcement, thus securing the vital Tunisian ports.

Initial indications were that the German attack would occur in the center of the three corps Allied line; this sector was held by the XIX French Corps (figure 4-2). As a result, the army commander, General Sir Kenneth Anderson, placed his reserve, consisting of a British armored division and a US brigade-sized combat command (CC), in this sector. As it turned out, the main German effort was to the south in the US II Corps sector in what was later to be called the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

II Corps was given a dual mission for this operation. The Corps was to protect the southern flank of XIX Corps and to defend in sector. Forces assigned to the II Corps included the 1st Armored Division(-), the 168th Regimental Combat Team, the 2d Derbyshire

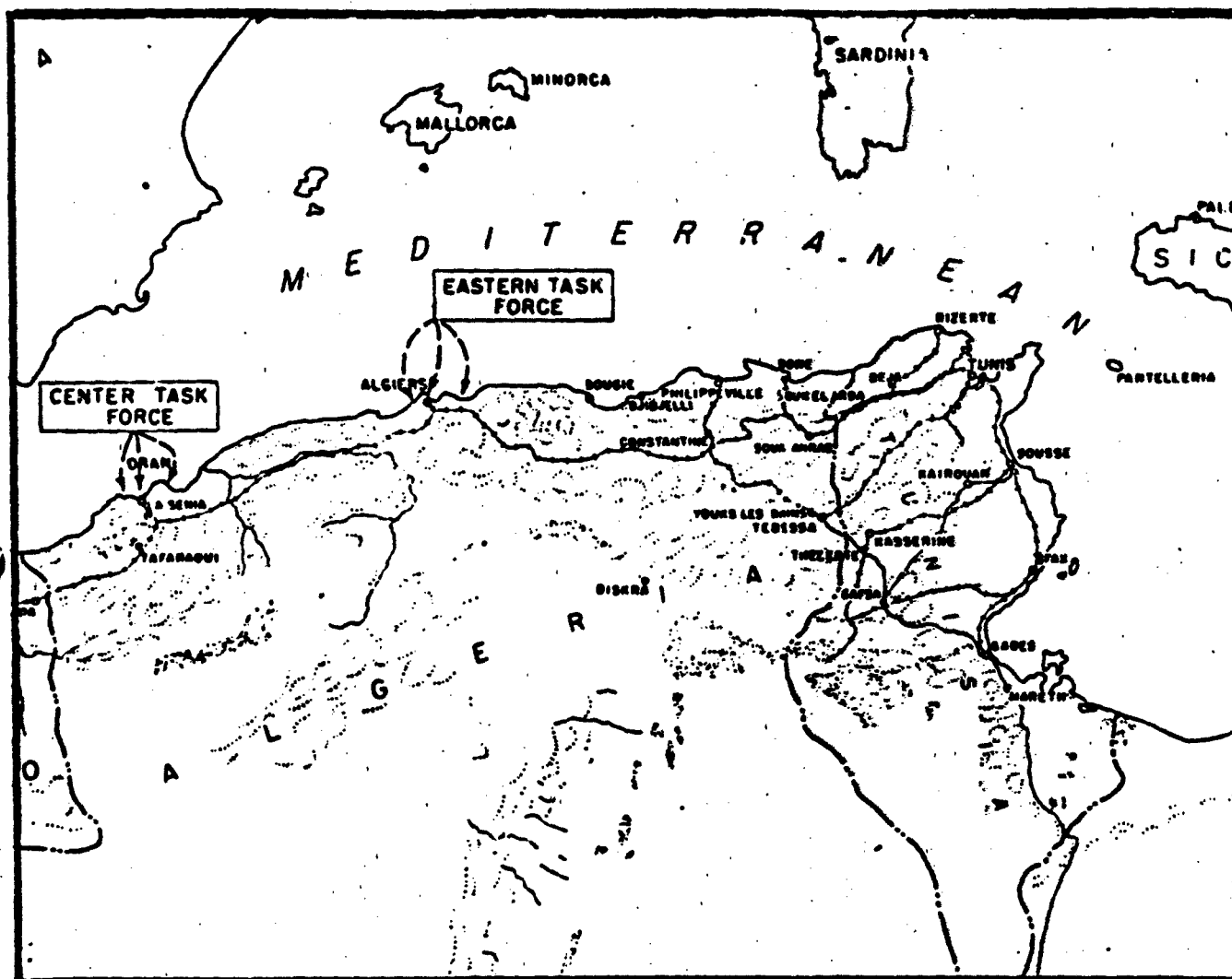


Figure 4-1. Allied Advance Into Africa

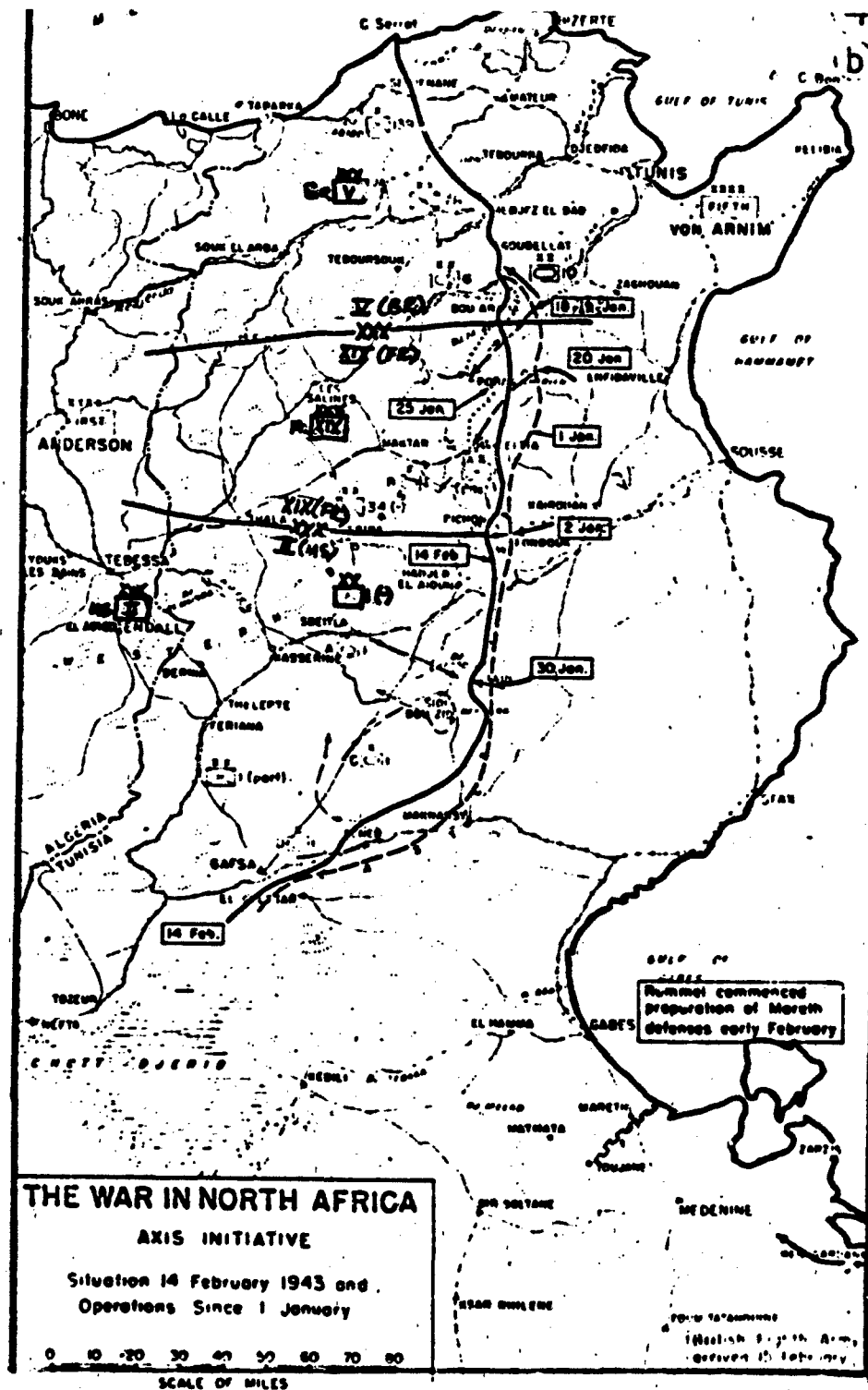


Figure 4-2. British First Army Disposition
 14 February 1943

Yeomanry (a British armored cavalry regiment which was actually about the size of a US squadron) and a French division-sized collection of units referred to as Force Welvert. The II Corps sector (figure 4-3) consisted of several key mountain passes which ran primarily to the east and thus to the key ports. The mission thus became one of early detection of the German intent and subsequent control of the passes.

Key terrain in the Corps sector included Faid Pass to the east, Maizla Pass to the southeast, and Sidi Bou Zid, a crossroad through which traffic from the passes would have to travel. Three hill masses in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid (Djebel Lessouda, Djebel Ksaira, and Djebel Garet Hudid) were also key. Further to the west in the corps sector lay the town of Kasserine, situated near the mountains and a major pass (Kasserine Pass) which were also key to Corps operations.

The II Corps Commander determined that the most likely enemy avenue of approach was through the Faid Pass and Sidi Bou Zid. To cover this avenue of approach he assigned the sector to the 1st Armored Division(-) which was reinforced by the majority of the 168th Regimental Combat Team (RCT). The armored cavalry unit and several battalion sized units from Force Welvert were used to screen the corps front. The corps reserve consisted of selected engineer, tank destroyer, and infantry units which had a primary mission of rear area security.

The precise employment of units on the ground was to a large degree determined by the corps commander, MG Lloyd R. Fredendall. He felt that the commander of the 1st Armored Division, MG Orlando Ward, was incompetent; as a result corps orders typically bypassed the division commander and staff to provide specific instructions to very low levels. 1 In the case of the defense of Sidi Bou Zid, the corps commander issued orders down to company and battery level. 2 This command environment and corps manner of operation limited to a large degree the flexibility of the 1st Armored Division in establishing its initial defense.

The 1st Armored habitually had ten organic and three attached maneuver battalions; however, for the defense of Sidi Bou Zid only seven of the thirteen were

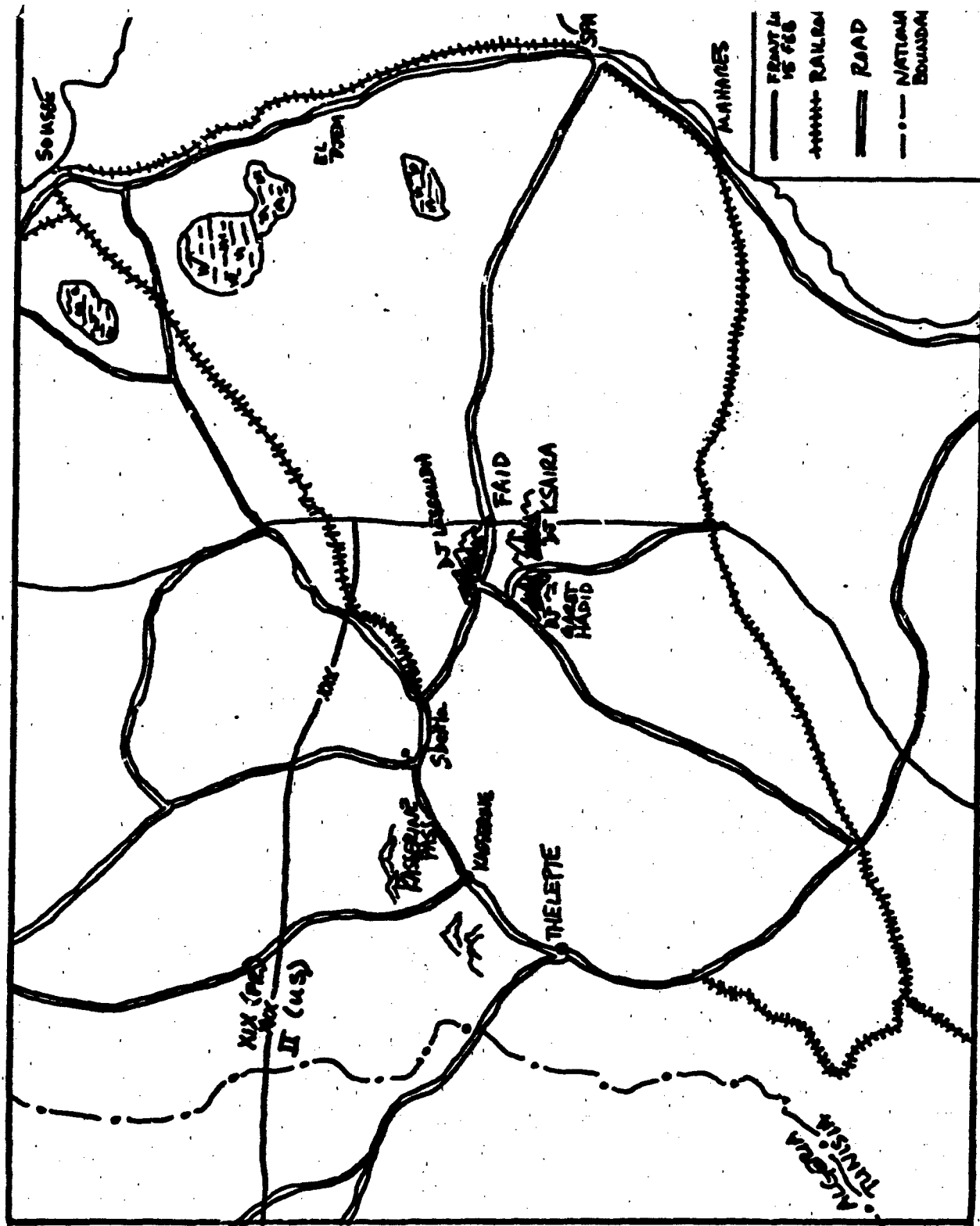


Figure 4-3. French XIX Corps and US II Corps Sector
14 February 1943

available. Three of the additional battalions were assigned to Combat Command B which was designated as the army reserve. Two additional battalions were attached to the corps screening force while the final detached battalion was used in rear area security operations. 3

Considering his available forces, MG Ward consolidated the regimental combat team with Combat Command A. The remaining two combat commands were used with the divisional 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion to guard the southern flank of the division. The division reserve consisted of one light tank battalion and one armored infantry battalion. Combat Command A (task organized as shown in Table 4-1) defended the most likely enemy avenue of approach. 4

The terrain in the vicinity of Faid Pass consisted of two parallel roads tracking out of the pass to the west and between two hill masses which were situated approximately eight kilometers apart. As previously mentioned, the corps order was very specific concerning actions to be taken by subordinate units. In this instance, II Corps specified that an infantry heavy battalion combat team (BCT) occupy the northern hill (Djebel Lessouda), that a reinforced infantry battalion occupy the southern hill (Djebel Ksaira), and that a reinforced armored battalion be the division reserve. This greatly reduced the options open to the commander of the 1st Armored Division and in fact drove the task organization of Combat Command A.

To accomplish his mission, the commander of Combat Command A, BG Raymond E. McQuillan, placed TF 2-168 on the northern hill mass, TF 3-168 on the southern hill mass, and 3/1 Armor (+) as the reserve (see figure 4-4.) McQuillan understood the weakness associated with the corps plan in its positioning of the two battalions so far apart in the desert. Although the troop disposition might have appeared to adequately cover the pass on a corps operations overlay, the battalions were not mutually supporting. As a result, the defense became dependent on two battalion-size outposts in the desert. To overcome this weakness, McQuillan augmented TF 2-168 with a medium tank company (G/3/1 Armor) and TF 3-168 with an antitank company (AT Co/168th Infantry). The Combat Command's concept called for each of the forward task forces to place tank and antitank elements forward in the area between the two hills during the daytime. At night, each task force

was to conduct dismounted patrols to cover the same area. The hope was that the nighttime patrols or the daytime blocking positions supported by artillery fire could delay the approaching enemy long enough for the reserve (3/1 Armor +) to move to the threatened area. Obviously, the greatest vulnerability each day was at dawn when the patrols were returning and the blocking forces were moving into position.

2/168th BCT
 2/168th Inf (-)
 G/3/1st AR
 Rcn Co/1st AR
 Plt/A/701st TD Bn

3/168th BCT
 3/168th Inf
 E/2/168th Inf
 AT Co/168th Inf
 Cannon Co/168th Inf
 Plt/109th Eng
 Rcn Plt/168th Inf

3/1st AR (+)
 A/701st TD Bn (-)

CC A Control
 91st AFA Bn (-)
 (105 mm SP)
 2/17th FA Bn
 (155 mm towed)
 Elements/443d CA
 (AAA)

Legend:

TD = Tank Destroyer
 CA (AAA) = Coast Artillery
 (Antiaircraft)
 AFA = Armored Field Artillery
 AR = Armored Regiment
 BCT = Battalion Combat Team

Note: The 2/168th BCT was commanded by the executive officer of the 1st AR, the headquarters of which was attached to CC A.

Table 4-1

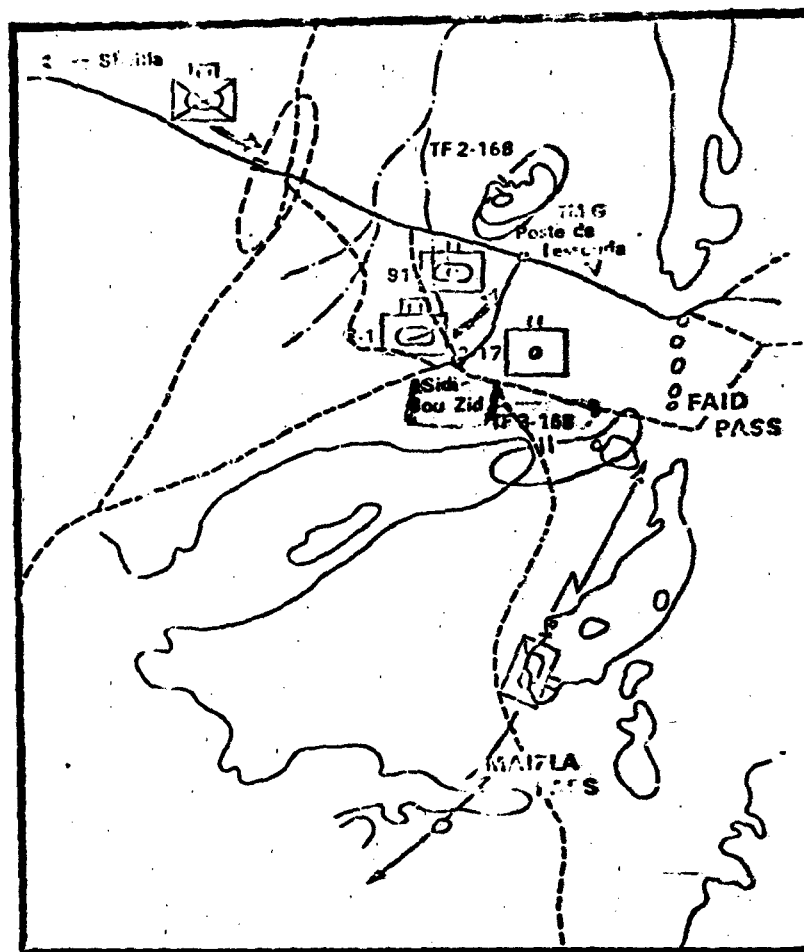


Figure 4-4. Disposition of Combat Command A
14 February 1943

The CC also had two battalions of field artillery at its disposal for this defense. The 91st Armored Field Artillery (-) was a self-propelled 105mm battalion while the 2/17th Field Artillery consisted of 155mm towed weapons. The 1st Armored Division also had the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion screening from south of Maizla Pass to Faid Pass in order to provide early warning to CC A in the event of attack from the southern flank.

A hand-drawn map of a mountainous region, likely in North Africa, showing various locations and routes. The map includes the following labels and features:

- Sbeitla**: Located at the top left, with an arrow pointing towards it.
- Gerhardt**: Located in the upper central part, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- Poste de Lessouda**: Located below Gerhardt, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- Sidi You Zid**: Located in the center, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- Stankhoff**: Located in the lower left, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- M. ZIA**: Located in the lower right, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- PASS**: Located to the right of Sidi You Zid, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- FAID PASS**: Located to the right of the main map area, marked with a boxed symbol containing an 'X'.
- Other symbols**: Several other boxed symbols, some with an 'X' above them, are scattered across the map, particularly in the lower right and bottom left.
- Routes**: Dashed lines indicate routes or boundaries, connecting various locations.
- Topography**: Contour lines and irregular shapes represent mountains and terrain.

Part IV - 9

The 10th Panzer, commanded by General Fritz von Broich, had extensive experience in France and Russia, and had participated in Guderian's breakthrough at Sedan in 1940. For this operation it consisted of only four maneuver battalions and one heavy tank company equipped with Mark VI Tiger tanks with reinforcing antitank and artillery units. General von Broich organized these forces into three brigade-size Kampfgruppen (KG) or battlegroups. The 10th Panzer's plan was to have the first unit, KG Gerhardt, consisting of a reinforced tank battalion and a reinforced mechanized battalion, exit Faid Pass, maneuver north of Djebel Lessouda, and attack the US forces from the rear. The second Kampfgruppen, KG Reimann, consisting of a mechanized battalion (augmented with engineers, infantry, and antitank units) and the divisional heavy tank company were to follow KG Gerhardt through Faid Pass and attack frontally through Sidi Bou Zid to Sbeitla. The third Kampfgruppen, consisting of a motorcycle battalion plus the divisional engineers and antitank units, were placed in reserve.

The 21st Panzer was the first German division in Africa and as such had more desert combat experience than any other unit on either side of the conflict. During the battle of Sidi Bou Zid, the 21st Panzer was under the command of Colonel Hans Hildebrandt and contained the equivalent of seven maneuver battalions. It was organized into two Kampfgruppen, KG Stenkoff (two tank and one mechanized battalions), and KG Schuette (one tank and one mechanized battalion). As figure 4-5 demonstrates, KG Stenkoff was to pass through Maizla Pass, move due west, and hook back to the north to attack Sidi Bou Zid from the rear. KG Schuette was to pass through Maizla Pass, turn north, and attack Sidi Bou Zid from the south. The 580th Reconnaissance Battalion was to guard the Fifth Panzer Army's southern flank while the nonmotorized elements of the 21st Panzer Division were to hold Faid Pass until Sidi Bou Zid was secured. The Germans intended to execute the operation on 14 February 1943.

At dawn on 14 February, G/3/1 Armor(+), attached to TF 2-168 on Djebel Lessouda, departed its nighttime positions to occupy its daytime blocking positions. Company G, commanded by Major Norman Parsons, was reinforced by elements of the regimental reconnaissance company and A/701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. As

Company G was moving to its daytime blocking positions, it made contact with the 10th Panzer Division moving down from Faid Pass. Indications are that Major Parson's tank, in the lead, was one of the first tanks to be destroyed, causing a loss of communications between Company G and headquarters, CC A. This loss of communications prevented the company from calling artillery fire support, and it was overrun in a short, violent action.

The exchange of tank fire convinced BG McQuillan that an engagement of significant size had occurred and that he should commit his reserve. He ordered 3/1 Armor(+) under the command of LTC Louis V. Hightower, to advance toward Poste de Lessouda to respond to the enemy attack. 5 As the 3/1st Armor began to depart from its assembly area, it was hit by a heavy enemy air strike. Although suffering some losses, the unit reorganized and continued to move. A short time later it was engaged by long range fire from the Mark VI Tiger tanks of KG Reimann. The 3/1st Armor was equipped with the M3 Grant, a tank with a shorter effective range than the Tiger; as a result, the battalion was stopped short of its objective, unable to maneuver close enough to be effective against the enemy tanks.

At this point, BG McQuillan began to receive reports of enemy activity from all elements of the combat command. TF 2/168th reported approximately 80 enemy armored vehicles moving to the north in front of its position; this was KG Gerhardt (see figure 4-5). The 2-168th also informed McQuillan that it had not received any information from Company G, 3/1 Armor since the initial contact had been reported. The 2-168th next sent a message indicating that the enemy force (still KG Gerhardt) had moved behind it, scattering B/91 Armored Field Artillery which had been positioned just to the rear of the 2-168th's positions. The Germans appeared to be moving south behind Djebel Lessouda in an effort to reach the east-west road leading to Sbeitla.

McQuellian next received a report from Colonel Thomas D. Drake, commander of the 3-168th BCT positioned southeast of Sidi Bou Zid on Djebel Ksaira, the other mountain selected by Corps for the defense of Faid Pass. Colonel Drake reported that a large enemy force (KG Reimann of the 10th Panzer) had maneuvered between the 2-168th and 3-168th positions and was

heading for the 1-17th Field Artillery positions. He further reported that the artillerymen had panicked and were fleeing. This meant that the majority of the CC A artillery had been forced out of action in the opening moments of the battle. McQuillan issued an order to the 2-17th FA to displace to a safer position, but as the battalion was organizing for the move it received an enemy air strike and was totally destroyed, with every gun lost.

LTC Hightower recognized that an attack from the east between the two BCT's would threaten his 3/1 Armor which was still in contact with the Mark VI Tigers. Fearing that he would be cut off by attacking elements of KG Reimann (see figure 4-4), he directed Company H to delay the enemy forces to the north while the remainder of 3/1st Armor withdrew under enemy pressure to Sidi Bou Zid. Under cover of direct fire from the 91st Armored Field Artillery(-), the 3/1st managed to complete the withdrawal, although it suffered heavy losses.

Meanwhile, the 21st Panzer Division had cleared the Maizla Pass at 0600 hours and began its movement north and west. The 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion which had the screening mission on the southern flank did not detect the 21st Panzer until 0940 when C/1/81st ARB reported twenty unidentified vehicles emerging from Maizla Pass. In addition to being over three and one-half hours late, the information failed to indicate the advance of a Panzer Division over terrain which strongly indicated the use of the mountain passes for westward movement.

KG Schutte of the 21st Panzer approached COL Drake's position (3-168 BCT) rapidly, while KG Stenkoff, which, as shown in figure 4-5 had a much longer distance to travel over rougher terrain, did not approach Sidi Bou Zid until late in the afternoon. This delay was fortunate for CC A since an earlier arrival by KG Stenkoff would have caught it in the midst of a withdrawal and might have led to the defeat in detail of BG McQuillan's force.

Major General Ward, commander of the 1st Armored Division, did not initially perceive the seriousness of the situation in CC A's sector because of the inadequacy of the reports which reached his headquarters. He did, however, attach most of the division reserve (1/6 BCT with 3 armored infantry

companies and 1 light tank company) to CC A. The 1/6th BCT was told to move forward toward Sidi Bou Zid. As battle loss reports began to arrive at the division headquarters later in the day, MG Ward began to recognize the seriousness of the situation. Reports indicated that 3/1 Armor had lost half of its tanks. Additionally, the arrival of KG Schuette at the 3-168th BCT position indicated the magnitude of the error made by the 81st ARB in reporting enemy main strength in the south.

Finally recognizing the gravity of CC A's situation, Ward ordered the 1/6th BCT to form a blocking position 11 miles to the west of Sidi Bou Zid on a piece of high ground along the road between Sidi Bou Zid and Sbeitla. The division commander further ordered CC A to withdraw its mobile elements through the blocking position held by 1/6th BCT to avoid being cut off. The commander's intent was to have the 2-168th BCT and 3-168th BCT, both lacking sufficient transport to move themselves, form strongpoints until a counterattack could be mounted to relieve them.

As the division commander was preparing these plans, the commander of the 3/1 Armor found himself facing the elements of KG Gerhardt pushing down from the north, to the west of Djebel Lessouda. Hightower's BCT was now attrited to approximately company size, but was able to hold off the German advances from the north long enough to allow the headquarters and service elements as well as the artillery elements of Combat Command A to withdraw to the west. Later in the afternoon, Hightower detected the advance of KG Stenkoff as it approached Sidi Bou Zid from the south. He reacted to this threat personally by moving his command track south of the Sidi Bou Zid road and engaging elements of KG Stenkoff as they approached. He knocked out several German vehicles and drove off the rest just before a final enemy round destroyed his tank. Hightower and his crew were able to escape from the damaged tank and 3/1st Armor thus managed to keep the road from Sidi Bou Zid through the blocking position occupied by the 1/6th BCT open for the withdrawal of those elements of CC A which could still maneuver. 6

This withdrawal ended the first phase of the battle of Sidi Bou Zid. At the conclusion of this phase, the 2-168th BCT was cut off on Djebel Lessouda, the 3-168th BCT was cut off on Djebel Ksaira, the

2/17th Field Artillery had been totally destroyed, and both the 3/1 Armor and the 91st Armored Field Artillery were attrited to the point of being combat ineffective. Equipment destroyed included fourteen tanks, ten of twelve tank destroyers in A/701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and nine of the twelve 105mm guns belonging to the 2/17th Field Artillery. 7 The only positive note was that the efforts of the 3/1 Armored had managed to save many trained tankers and artillerymen who would be critical in the later reconstitution of the battalions in Combat Command A.

The II Corps and First Army staffs believed that the action in Sidi Bou Zid was a result of an attack by the 21st Panzer Division alone. The 10th Panzer Division had not been specifically identified and the estimated 90-120 tanks which had been reported could have come from the 21st Panzer. Thus it was thought that the German main attack would still occur in the French XIX Corps sector spearheaded by the 10th Panzer Division. As a result, the only reinforcement sent to assist the 1st Armored Division was a tank battalion from the Army reserve. The Army order to II Corps stated, "As regards the action in the Sidi Bou Zid area, concentrate on clearing up the situation there and destroying the enemy."

The nature of the order indicates the lack of knowledge at the Army level concerning German troop strength and disposition at Sidi Bou Zid. The 1st Armored Division, on the other hand, had better information with which to plan. MG Ward was aware that the attacking force had at least 90 tanks and was attacking in such a manner (i.e., along multiple axis through two passes fifteen to twenty miles apart) that two major maneuver elements were probably involved. Despite this, Ward decided to counterattack with Combat Command C under the command of Colonel Robert I. Stack.

Combat Command C consisted of 2/1 Armor, 3/6 Armored Infantry, G/3/13 Armor, and supporting artillery and tank destroyers. Thus, CC C was to counterattack to destroy a force known to be of at least division size -- an enemy which had just encircled or routed CC A, a force larger than CC C itself. The mission of the counterattack force was to move to rescue 2-168th BCT on Djebel Lessouda and 3-168th BCT on Djebel Keaira, both over thirteen miles away. To accomplish this, the brigade-sized CC C would

have to deal with two Panzer divisions; the attempt was doomed to failure.

Combat Command C's poor execution of the counterattack plan further contributed to the failure of the operation. CC C crossed its line of departure at Djebel Hamra where 1/6 BCT had established a blocking position to cover the withdrawal of CC A. The movement began with battalions in column along the road, led by the 2/1st Armor BCT, followed by the 68th Armored Field Artillery, 3/6th Armored Infantry BCT, and 6/3/13 Armor as the CC reserve.

The 75mm half-track tank destroyers from B/701st Tank Destroyer Battalion were positioned on the wing of the lead battalion. Accounts of the battle do not indicate the employment of front or flank security for the formation. Colonel Stack decided to position his command post on top of Djebel Hamra so that he could observe the movement of the force all the way to Sidi Bou Zid. This left the commander of the 2/1st Armor BCT to control not only his own BCT, which was the most likely to be engaged first, but also the remainder of the counterattack force on the ground. Because of the long distances to be traveled by some elements of the counterattack force, not to mention enemy air raids which repeatedly struck the assembly area of CC C, the counterattack was delayed until about 1240 hours on the 14th. By this time the entire combat command was finally on the road moving to the southeast toward Sidi Bou Zid (see figure 4-6).

As the unit moved eastward, the Germans positioned antitank batteries directly to its front in a blocking position. Air strikes and artillery barrages further delayed the command's progress and spread confusion in its ranks. Simultaneously, KG Gerhart attacked from the north and KG Stenkhoff attacked from the south. The combined effect was a massing of fires on CC C from the front, right, left, and above.

The axis of advance for the counterattack crossed three wadis (figure 4-6), but each of these wadis could only be crossed at selected points. At the first wadi the platoon of tank destroyers on the northern flank of the counterattack force was destroyed by an air attack. At the second wadi the lead tank company made contact with an enemy antitank battery, engaged it, and knocked it out. By this time, however, the enemy artillery had ranged the attackers and the tanks were forced to

button up, severely limiting their visibility. As the command reached the third wadi, it came within range of the heavy antitank guns which engaged the lead tank companies with effective fire, knocking out several vehicles. This fire caused the 68th Field Artillery to

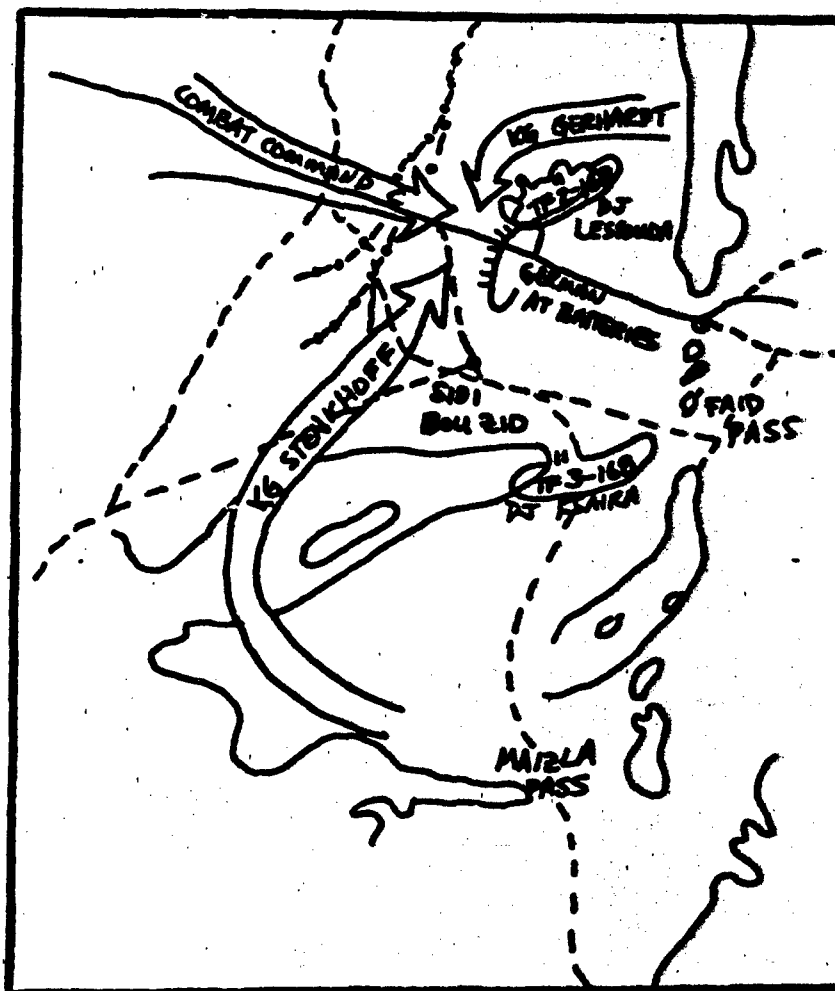


Figure 4-6. Counterattack of Combat Command C

deploy and prepare to return fire. As the 68th FA deployed and the 3/6th BCT to its rear began to pass through, an enemy air strike hit both units, further disrupting the advance. As the aircraft departed, flank attacks by KG Gerhardt from the north and KG

Stenkhoﬀ from the south struck the formation at the same time. In the intense fighting which followed, LTC Alger, the tactical commander of the counterattack force, lost his tank to the enemy fire.

Reacting to the flank attacks, Company E moved to block the northern attack and Company F moved to block the southern approach. This caused the Germans to extend further to the west in an attempt to encircle the entire force. This extension to the west by the southern force (KG Stenkhoﬀ) was blocked momentarily by fire from the 68th Artillery. The reserve, G/3/13 Armor, was sent to block the extension westward by the northern German force (KG Gerhardt), but went too far to the northwest and missed the enemy entirely. At this point, most of the American forces attempted a rapid withdrawal. By 1740 hours the 3/6th BCT, heavily attrited but intact, had managed to withdraw under the cover provided by the 68th FA. The 2/1st Armor BCT was surrounded and, with the exception of four tanks which managed to escape, was destroyed.

The counterattack had failed completely and the 2-168th BCT and 3-168th BCT were left surrounded on Djebel Lessouda and Djebel Ksair without any hope of relief. Both BCT's were ordered to destroy the equipment they could not carry out and exfiltrate back to friendly lines. The 2-168th managed to get more than 200 men back, but no soldiers from the 3-168th escaped. Those members of the 3-168th who were not killed outright were captured and moved to Sfax from which they were transported by train to Tunis, by plane and ship to Italy, and finally by train again to prisoner of war camps in Germany and Poland. The first action in which American soldiers were pitted against German panzers had ended in disaster.

SIDI BOU ZID

PART IV - ENDNOTES

1 H. Essame, Patton, A Study In Command, New York, 1974, p.67.

2 After Action Report, 1st Armored Division, 3 Feb. 1943 to 18 Feb. 1943.

3 CPT William R. Betson, "Sidi Bou Zid - A Case History of Failure," Armor, Nov-Dec, 1982, p. 38.

4 George P. Howe, Northwest Africa; Siezing the Initiative in the West, Washington, D.C., p. 378.

5 Howe, p. 411.

6 Howe, p. 415.

7 Howe, p. 415.

Sidi bou Zid

Part V - Conclusions

From a strategic point of view, the Battle of Sidi Bou Zid was of little immediate importance. Certainly the Germans showed their tactical superiority over the green Americans in their smooth coordination of fire and maneuver. Their victory also cracked the Allied defensive barrier, allowing the German forces to gain the initiative while bolstering their confidence in themselves. It also disrupted Allied efforts to mount a coordinated attack and relegated them to a defensive posture.

The fact that they had so roughly handled the American Army in its first outing gave the Germans a tremendous psychological advantage. For their part, the Americans began to recognize the complexities of modern war; tactics born of stateside training and pre-war constraints were simply inadequate for the African Theater. As a result, the American Army began to train anew; the process came to fruition at the Second Battle of Kasserine Pass, where the Americans proved quick learners.

The Germans did gain an immediate tactical advantage in that they routed the American forces and made them vulnerable to exploitation. The battle of Sidi Bou Zid was the first step in a German drive to capture areas commanding the mountain passes, thus throwing the allied forces off balance and keeping them from mounting a coordinated attack. However, hesitation on the part of the German high command allowed this advantage to slip through their fingers. As a result, the Allies were still able to achieve their major strategic objective of building strength and a logistics base for a major campaign in Africa in spite of their initial drubbing at Sidi Bou Zid.

While the Allied defeat was not of long-term strategic importance, the German failure to capitalize on their success was eventually decisive. This failure to exploit the situation together with subsequent failures at Sbeitla and Kasserine Pass (the second battle) allowed the US forces to bolster their

defenses, take corrective training action, and eventually mount the major offensive which drove the Axis forces out of North Africa. Thus, if any aspect of the Battle of Sidi Bou Zid was decisive, it was not the American defeat but, ironically, the German failure to follow up on their resounding success.

The lessons to be learned from this battle are neither new nor surprising, but they are so important that they bear repeating in detail.

a. All forces must be mutually supporting. The use of independent strong points in a main defensive line invites disaster. Only a coordinated defense can repel a serious assault by a combined arms force.

b. Commanders must not dictate actions to their subordinates in such rigid, detailed fashion that they strip their subordinate commanders of initiative and the authority to conduct the battle. Issuing specific instructions two echelons down is a dangerous practice which is only justified by unusual circumstances.

c. Commanders must lead from the front, positioning (and constantly re-positioning) themselves to see the battle, instead of relying solely on map recon. Fredendahl never went to the front and did not have a good appreciation of the field of battle.

d. Command Posts must be positioned well forward so that command and control are not hampered by distance and communications failures.

e. The principle of mass is decisive on the battlefield, particularly when armored forces are involved. In this battle the US forces failed to concentrate at critical times and places, and never fought as a team. The contrast between US piecemeal commitment of forces and the coordinated German attack spelled the difference between victory and defeat. Successful coordination of German air attacks and inadequate coordination of US air defense was also a critical element of the German victory.

d. Both ground and air recon on the US side were very poor. Even the poor American tactical plan might have been saved if the commanders at all levels had received timely, accurate information concerning enemy locations, strengths, and movements. US procedures for passing intelligence between levels of command also proved inadequate.

e. Training must continue right up to the moment the troops are committed, to include periods of deployment and while waiting for action. Learning curves decay rapidly; only through constant, repetitive training can soldiers maintain a combat edge.

f. US doctrine must be adapted to the special geographic considerations of any area of operations. In this battle commanders tried to apply doctrine designed for Ft. Knox directly to their battle in the desert.

g. Reserves must be properly configured for the enemy they are likely to fight (not an armored infantry unit designated to counterattack against a tank attack), and properly positioned and briefed for timely employment.

h. Command relationships must be properly delineated before the battle begins; command echelons must not be ignored in the heat of battle.

i. Artillery must be assigned to and employed by an artillery commander.

j. There is no substitute for the combined arms team. The employment of forces by combat speciality is an invitation to disaster.